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Edited by
**Masood Khoshsaligheh**
Professor, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad

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# Image Recognition and Content Comprehension in Media Accessibility: A Study on the Reception of Audiences with Limited Hearing

**Farzaneh Shokoohmand[1]**

Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran

**Masood Khoshsaligheh[2*]**

Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran

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## Abstract

This experimental study examined techniques of subtitling for the deaf and hard-of-hearing (SDH) from the point of viewers' content comprehension and image recognition. Three groups of deaf and hard of hearing people (n = 78) participated in the study. The research focused on four parameters: speed of subtitles, speaker identification, emotion and sound indication. By selecting three usual techniques for each parameter, three subtitled versions of a movie were produced. Each group of participants watched one of the subtitled versions and comprehension and freeze-frame tests were employed to examine participants' reception. Based on the results, except for the image recognition, there were significant differences among the techniques in terms of participants' content comprehension. As for the techniques of speaker identification, color-coding caused significantly better content comprehension scores than tagging. Concerning sound comprehension, the three techniques were not significantly different from one another in terms of viewers' content comprehension. Regarding emotion comprehension, the absence of information and emoticons helped the participants comprehend characters' tone and mood better than emotion descriptions.

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[1] https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4084-004X | ✉ farzaneh.shokoohmand@gmail.com
[2] https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6508-1986 | ✉ khoshsaligheh@um.ac.ir

* Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran

## 1. Introduction

"Who is still excluded? Who gets to create and decide? Where is my position in all of this?" These are three key questions that Romero Fresco and Dangerfield's (2022) pose when writing on media accessibility. These questions point to different agents situated in the various stages of media production, distribution, and localization. They also partially underpin some of the foundations upon which various strands of audiovisual translation (AVT) research is built. The insights provided by reception research in AVT in terms of viewers' perceptions are traditionally considered useful if fed into the production cycles and provided to policymakers, and higher-order agents. The importance of such insights cannot be overestimated because viewing subtitled policymakers require viewers to have the capability of multiple resource allocations to understand and enjoy all the information received from on-screen actions, the soundtrack, and subtitles (d'Ydewalle & Gielen, 1992; Krejtz et al., 2015). Many studies considered attention allocating a partially automatic process, suggesting that using subtitles does not usually create any trade-off between subtitles and images (d'Ydewalle & Gielen, 1992; d'Ydewalle & Pavakanun, 1997; Orero et al., 2012). Discovering where such trade-offs occur and how to come up with ways to minimize any potential factor undermining viewers' experience while consuming audiovisual products falls within the purview of reception studies in audiovisual translation research (Di Giovanni & Gambier, 2018; Zahedi & Khoshsaligheh, 2021).

However, when it comes to deaf and hard-of-hearing (DHH) viewers, the trade-off between subtitles and images seems inevitable. Parallel processing of information—all through the visual sense—imposes high cognitive demands on DHH viewers and may oblige them to read subtitles at the cost of missing images. Moreover, most deaf people do not achieve good reading skills compared to their hearing peers (Albertini & Mayer, 2011; Qi & Mitchell, 2012; Domínguez & Alegria, 2010; Mathews & O'Donnell, 2020), and need long processing times and rich attentional resources to retrieve the accurate meaning of a text (Jelinek Lewis & Jackson, 2001). These special needs are contrary to the fragmented and fleeting nature of subtitles (Kruger & Steyn, 2014), which prevents any control over the presentation rate or any reference to previous information (Krejtz et al., 2015). Furthermore, condensation and reformulation of the dialogue list, which usually happens in subtitling due to temporal and spatial constraints, may weaken the cohesive ties within and across sentences and make high demands on viewers' subtitle processing, resulting in DHH viewers' spending most of their time reading subtitles and failing to use the image (Moran, 2012).

In comparative eye-tracking studies on DHH and hearing viewers, DHH viewers manifested longer fixation durations, a higher fixation count, and longer dwell time in the subtitle zone (Szarkowska et al., 2011). This evidence is in opposition to the manifestations of high proficiency in subtitle reading, which are shorter dwell time, a lower number of fixations, and shorter fixation duration (Rayner, 1998). The manifestations have been explained by the fact that in many cases the language of subtitles is DHH viewers' second language after sign language; therefore, reading subtitles could not be an effortless task for them (Szarkowska et al., 2016; Robson, 2004; Holmqvist et al., 2011). This issue, however, does not rule out the influence of other contributing factors such as viewers' habits and preferences or typographical

features of subtitles referred to in other studies (e.g., Gambier, 2003; Neves, 2005; d'Ydewalle & Gielen, 1992; Perego, 2008).

To ensure that DHH viewers experience a smooth subtitle reading process while using subtitled programs, many researchers in the new avenue of media accessibility are increasingly focusing on SDH parameters from the point of reception, that is, the study of viewers' comprehension and perception. Although reception is a culture-oriented issue, most of the existing knowledge on SDH reception has been obtained from North American and European countries. To fill this significant gap, the present research aimed to analyze Iranian DHH viewers' reception of SDH by focusing on four parameters: speed of subtitles, speaker identification, emotion and sound indication. It examined reception through the two dependent variables of content comprehension and image recognition. This research would have the potential to expand our understanding of subtitling in a non-American and non-European country.

The significant aspects of the approach adopted in this study are the treatment of three variables for four SDH parameters, the treatment of two groups of the deaf and hard of hearing, and the language of the experiment (Persian). It is also interesting to note that the participants of the present study differed from those who participated in most SDH studies of other countries in that they were not regular users of SDH because of the very limited history of SDH in the country (Shokoohmand & Khoshsaligheh, 2019). According to the 3 Rs model proposed by Gambier (2018), this reception study encompassed 'response' and 'reaction' of viewers. It differs from the EU-funded project DTV4ALL (Romero-Fresco, 2015) and other similar research in that it did not address participants' preferences and hearing people's experiences and did not use an eye-tracker.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Previous empirical research on speed of subtitles

Given the lower reading skills of DHH people compared with their hearing peers, a significant body of SDH literature explores whether subtitles should be standard, edited or verbatim. Standard subtitling is the result of minimal changes, such as the omission of repetitions, which commonly occur in spoken language (Szarkowska et al., 2011). Edited subtitling is achieved through lexical and structural condensation and reformulation, aiming at simplifying the text and facilitating the reading process. In contrast, verbatim subtitling is the word for word transcription of the dialogue list.

In some research, edition has been supported as a useful tool for making the speed of subtitles adjusted to the reading speed of the viewers (Cambra et al., 2009; Franco & Vera, 2003; Neves, 2008; Santiago-Araújo, 2004; Cambra et al., 2015; Cambra et al., 2010). Meyer and Benjamin (1995) studied the effect of subtitles with two different speeds (78 and 116 wpm) on students' comprehension. The results revealed that slow-paced subtitles are significantly more effective than average-paced ones. The analysis conducted by Burnham et al. (2008) showed that text reduction contributed to the comprehension of proficient readers more than to that of less proficient readers. It also revealed that the readable speed for proficient deaf

readers was 130 wpm, whereas it was 180 wpm for proficient hard-of-hearing readers. In their study, Tyler et al. (2009) investigated the effect of three subtitle speeds (90, 120, or 180 wpm) on the comprehension of better- and weaker-readers in schools. The findings revealed that regardless of reading levels, comprehension was higher at 90 and 120 wpm than at 180 wpm.

The results of DTV4ALL (Romero-Fresco, 2015) determined the optimum subtitling speed of 150 wpm, for it would allow the viewers to balance their attention distribution between the subtitle and image. In the same manner, the study conducted by Tamayo (2016) focused on the reading speed of subtitles for hearing-impaired children on Spanish television channels. The findings revealed that a maximum speed of 12 cps is considered adequate, based on the theoretical review. In addition, the study found that only approximately half of the subtitles on each channel adhere to this recommended speed. This indicates that television channels aimed exclusively at younger audiences in Spain may fail to be read and comprehended effectively by their intended viewers.

However, the results of other studies showed that although unreduced subtitles are typically fast-paced, they may yield better subtitle processing on the viewers' part compared to reduced subtitles (de Linde and Kay, 1999b; Szarkowska et al., 2011). As a case in point, Szarkowska et al. (2016) discussed this evidence based on Moran's (2012) and Schilperoord, de Groot, and van Son's (2005) studies, reasoning that unreduced texts use the benefits of cohesive devices more than reduced texts. According to Gottlieb (2012), reduction makes the dialogues artificial and soulless, which probably causes viewers to lose their interest in following the storyline. Moreover, edited subtitles for the lack of intersemiotic cohesion with characters' lip movements may lead to DHH viewers' distraction, and poor comprehension, as a result (Jensema et al., 1996; Ghia, 2012; Szarkowska et al., 2016; de Linde & Kay, 1999b).

Some reception studies found the minimal edition used in standard subtitling sufficient (e.g., Eugeni, 2015; Szarkowska et al., 2015). In the study conducted by Jensema (1998) on 577 DHH and hearing participants viewing videos with different speeds, 145 wpm was the preferred speed for all viewers. This result was close to the subtitling speed usually used on American television with a maximum of 19% text reduction (Jensema et al., 1996). Arnáiz-Uzquiza (2015) observed that standard subtitles functioned better than verbatim and edited subtitles in terms of both viewers' attention distribution and comprehension.

Some research did not reveal any correlation between speed of subtitles and viewers' comprehension scores (Jensema & Burch, 1999; Ward et al., 2007). For example, Braverman and Hertzog (1980) explored the effect of subtitling speed and the language level of subtitles on DHH viewers' comprehension. The findings showed that it was not subtitling speed, but the language level of subtitles that influenced the comprehension, particularly in poorer readers.

Apart from the correlation between subtitling speed and viewers' comprehension, the impact of subtitling speed on DHH viewers' attention distribution has also been studied through image-recognition tests such as freeze-frame tests and also technology-based tools such as eye trackers (e.g., Cambra et al., 2014; Shroyer & Birch, 1980; de Linde & Kay, 1999b). Many studies showed that viewers tend to allocate more attention to reading subtitles than to watching images (Nugent, 1983; Jensema et al., 1996; Baker, 1985;

d'Ydewalle & De Bruycker, 2007; Kruger et al., 2015; Jensema et al., 2000; d'Ydewalle et al., 1991; Grillo & Kawin, 1981; Perego et al., 2010). d'Ydewalle et al. (1991) noticed two-line subtitles might make the viewers devote more time to subtitles and frequently switch back and forth between the images and subtitles. In studying the eye movements of people viewing the videos with and without subtitles, Jensema et al. (2000) observed that the addition of subtitles caused the viewers to spend the time mostly on reading subtitles. This evidence holds true, especially when viewers would rely on the subtitles to gain access to the AV product, from which they would have been excluded without subtitles (Kruger et al., 2015: 4).

The study done by de Linde and Kay (1999b) showed that highly editing out led to viewers less re-reading of subtitles and lower fixation counts, giving them more time to watch the images. Similarly, Chapdelaine et al. (2007) provided evidence, as Jensema et al. (2000) had done previously, that fast-paced subtitles are likely to lead to viewers spending more time on the subtitle zone. This research also demonstrated that the level of deafness and the genre of the program were significant factors influencing viewers' eye movements. Comparing verbatim, standard and edited subtitles, Szarkowska et al. (2011) found that all deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing participants spent more time reading verbatim subtitles. Furthermore, both edited and standard subtitles do not hinder viewers' regular switching between subtitles and images. Similarly, the results of the DTV4ALL project proved the optimum subtitling speed of 180 for the scenes with seen images and 150 wpm for the scenes with unseen images (Romero-Fresco, 2015).

Despite numerous empirical studies on subtitling speed, the discrepancies between studies confirm that further studies are still needed. Moreover, since cultural and habitual aspects probably have significant impacts on viewers' performances, extensive research in non-American and non-European countries is needed to provide knowledge on DHH viewers' reception of SDH in these countries.

## 2.2. Previous empirical research on SDH specific parameters

Apart from dialogues, DHH viewers have difficulty gaining access to other aural elements. De Linde and Kay (1999a) provided evidence that the subtitles relating to a speaker not present on the screen were the most difficult ones for DHH viewers to process because these subtitles lead to deaf viewers looking for a speaker on screen. To avoid this confusion, subtitling relevant audio parameters is the defining aspect of SDH (Neves, 2009). Three audio parameters that are usually provided in SDH, particularly for movies, and have mostly been studied in SDH research are speaker identification, emotion and sound indication.

### 2.2.1. Speaker identification

Color-coding, displacement (or speaker-dependent placement), and name-tagging are the most frequently employed techniques of speaker identification in European countries. Color-coding has been identified as a preferred strategy in some media studies involving both adults and children (Lorenzo, 2010; Pereira, 2010; Tamayo, 2016). Vy and Fels (2010) provided evidence that displaced subtitles disturbed viewers' concentration. In a study in Poland, reading displaced subtitles was reported to take much more time from viewers in comparison with other subtitles. However, displaced subtitles resulted in the best

comprehension after tagged subtitles. (Szarkowska et al., 2015). In Spain, Arnáiz-Uzquiza (2015) found that displacement, although rarely used on TV, triggered the best comprehension. However, the participants spent the longest time reading displaced subtitles, followed by tagged and color-coded ones. The overall conclusion of the study suggested the combination of color-coding with displacement or tagging in cases where the use of a single technique is not sufficient. In Italy, displacement triggered the best comprehension score among Italian participants, followed by color-coding and tagging (Eugeni, 2015).

### 2.2.2. Sound indication

Concerning sound effects, using icons, tagging the source of the sound heard, and describing the sound are usual techniques employed in different countries. Although the provision of sound effects is considered a main parameter of SDH, Szarkowska et al. (2015) observed that the participants achieved the best comprehension score using the subtitles with no sound content, and surprisingly, they showed the worst comprehension watching subtitles with descriptive labels for sound effects. Moreover, subtitles with sound descriptions made the participants spend a longer time on the subtitle zone.

Similar results were obtained in Spain; subtitles with no sound information helped deaf participants perform best, and sound description, as the technique in use in Spain, was not proved as the best technique (Arnáiz-Uzquiza, 2015). In Italy, subtitles with no sound information compared to those with icons and descriptions lead to the best comprehension and shortest reading time (Eugeni, 2015). Sound description, as the usual technique on German TV, and icons resulted in the best and worst comprehension scores, respectively (Mascow, 2015).

### 2.2.3. Emotion indication

According to Gottlieb (2012, p. 51), the written nature of subtitles does not represent prosodic aspects of speech, and added punctuation marks and italics are only "faint echoes" of a certain intonation. Some studies explored what techniques of emotion indication would help DHH viewers access the para-linguistic clues of speech. The use of smileys or emoticons was useful for Portuguese DHH viewers because of "the economy of their pictorial nature" (Neves, 2009, p. 162). In the DTV4ALL project in Poland, emotion description resulted in the best comprehension scores among the participants, followed by emoticons and no emotion indication (Szarkowska et al., 2015). Interestingly, the participants exposed to subtitles with no emotion information spent more time reading subtitles compared to those exposed to subtitles with emoticons and descriptions.

In Spain, different results were obtained from different groups (Arnáiz-Uzquiza, 2015). The hearing group achieved the best comprehension score when subtitles did not include any emotional information. However, the deaf and hard-of-hearing obtained the best comprehension using subtitles with descriptions and emoticons, respectively. In Italy, Eugeni (2015) found that emoticons, as opposed to description, helped the participants achieve the best comprehension and allocate sufficient time to the images.

However, subtitles with no emotion indication, as the current practice in Italy, also had good results in terms of both comprehension and short reading time. In Germany, subtitles with no emotion information and those with emotion description resulted in the best and lowest comprehension, respectively (Mascow, 2015). Reading subtitles with emotion description took the participants the longest time.

The literature on SDH parameters proves that this area of research has not received enough scholarly attention yet. However, if the countries are to ensure equal media accessibility, they should grasp what techniques make SDH more effective and user-friendly from the point of target users' reception.

## 3. Method

This study investigated the quality of SDH techniques from the point of Iranian DHH viewers' comprehension. The study involved testing the comprehension of three groups of DHH participants viewing segments of a movie. The segments were subtitled in three versions. Every version presented a different technique as a variable for an SDH parameter (for instance, the use of the variable "emoticons" for the parameter "emotion indication"). Each group was exposed to only one of the versions. Differences in test scores were searched for as an indicator of divergence in movie comprehension across participants using different subtitling techniques.

The study measured movie comprehension through the two dependent variables of content comprehension and image recognition. The first measure was obtained through a multiple-choice test, and the second one was acquired through freeze-frame tests. Freeze-frame tests were used by Perego et al. (2010) to measure viewers' image recognition. In freeze-frame tests, the respondents were given a seen and an unseen image and were required to choose the image they had seen during the experiment. High scores in freeze-frame tests would reveal an SDH technique that allowed the viewers to enjoy a balanced attention distribution between the subtitle zone and the image.

### 3.1. Participants

Two special high schools (girls and boys) and a deaf association contributed to the study. Prior to any contact with these organizations, to comply with Iran's code of conduct for research integrity, letters of cooperation were issued by the university to the Special Education Organization and Welfare Organization as two main governmental organizations responsible for catering for people who have special educational and social needs. Following that, the experimental protocol and procedures of the research were approved by the ethics committee of the mentioned organizations and a written promise was signed by the researcher binding her to adhere to ethical principles of accountability, reliability, honesty, and consideration.

112 DHH people agreed to participate in the study by completing a self-report questionnaire (37 from girls' school, 35 from boys' school, and 40 from the Deaf Association). Every person who did not have any distinguishing physical feature but deafness and who had previously not seen the movie (stimulus) was eligible to be a volunteer. Out of 112, 90 volunteers met these eligibility criteria. They were from

different age groups with different onsets of hearing loss and educational levels. To have three society-like groups, 78 people were selected out of the 90 volunteers and classified into three groups ($n = 26$, 26, 26). The groups had similarities in terms of age, the level of education, hearing status, and the onset of hearing loss.

The age brackets of the participants were 13–17 (29.48%), 18–29 (50%), 30–39 (17.94%), and 40–49 (2.56%). All of them declared sign language as their first language. The volunteers stated their degree of hearing loss, defined in decibels. As Table 1 shows, over half of the subjects were born with hearing loss (about 57%), and about 73% of them used to have a hearing aid, and they were using them during the study. All participants, with four education levels of primary school (5%), secondary school (31%), high school (35%), and university (29%), attended special schools. The participants reported their reading proficiency in Persian on a 5-point scale, where 1 means *no proficiency* and 5 means *being able to read complicated texts like philosophical texts*. Most participants declared their proficiency as *being able to read a standard newspaper or textbook* (58%), suggesting that for most of the participants, reading in Persian would not be a very daunting task.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics for participants

| Type of hearing loss | N |
|---|---|
| Mild (25-39dB) | 4 |
| Moderate (40-69dB) | 13 |
| Severe (70-94dB) | 23 |
| Profound (>95dB) | 38 |
| Onset of hearing loss | N |
| Pre-lingual | 45 |
| Peri-lingual | 26 |
| Post-lingual | 7 |

### 3.2. Stimulus

The stimulus was the first 40 minutes of an Iranian drama movie. The movie was chosen as the stimulus because it was a popular one in the country and also won a number of global awards, among them, the Oscar (2012) and the Golden Globe Awards (2012).

The first 20 minutes of the movie was subtitled in three versions for three groups to compare three variables of the parameter of speed—edited, standard, and verbatim—in terms of viewers' comprehension and image recognition (Table 2). The subtitles were created using EZtitles 5.2.18. The primary established criteria for line segmentation, line length, synchronization, and presentation time were followed (Ivarsson & Carroll, 1998). All subtitles were white, centered, and placed at the bottom of the screen.

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics for three variables of speed parameter

| Linguistic parameters | Variables | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Edited | Standard | Verbatim |
| Total no. of characters with spaces | 7633 | 9178 | 10906 |
| Total no. of words | 1521 | 1731 | 2031 |
| Total no. of subtitles | 309 | 383 | 380 |
| No. of 1-line subtitles | 238 | 301 | 265 |
| No. of 2-line subtitles | 71 | 82 | 115 |
| Characters per second | 10 | 12 | 15 |

The second 20 minutes of the movie were subtitled in three versions for three groups to compare three variables of the parameters of speaker identification, emotion and sound indication (Table 3). In all three versions, the speed of the subtitles was 12 cps.

**Table 3.** Variables for the parameters of speaker identification, emotion and sound indication

| SDH Parameters | Variables | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Speaker identification (scenes with multiple speakers) | Displacement | Color-coding | Tagging |
| Speaker identification (voice-off) | Tagging & brackets | Color-coding & italic | Tagging |
| Emotion indication | Descriptions | None | Emoticons |
| Sound indication | Detailed descriptions | Labeling the source of sounds | Icons |

## 3.3. Instrumentation

To compare the quality of the variables from the point of participants' comprehension, a self-administered, 15-page printed test was employed. The questions were derived from the DTV4ALL project, but they had to be domesticated in some cases due to linguistic and cultural differences. Three scholars of audiovisual translation studies supervised the formulation of comprehension and freeze-frame tests. A pilot study using 13 participants established the clarity of the questionnaire's items. Moreover, two sign language interpreters were consulted, who advised on how to improve the accessibility of the questionnaire. The pilot test revealed the necessity of the presence of a sign language interpreter throughout the procedures of data collection.

The test included two sections. In Section 1, the participants answered nine multiple-choice questions designed to test their content comprehension of subtitles with three different speeds. The participants had to select an item from the four items, a correct response, two distracters, and not- recalled item (NR). Each question included an image of the intended scene to provide the participants with the context. To measure image recognition, the participants answered five freeze-frame questions. Each question included two very

similar images that only one of them had been taken from the segments shown during the experiment. The participants were required to identify the image they have seen in the segments.

Section 2 included 28 multiple-choice questions. Speaker-identification questions were divided into two parts: 1. speaker identification in scenes with multiple speakers (4 content comprehension and 4 image recognition questions), 2. Speaker identification in voice-off situations (5 content comprehension and 5 image recognition questions). In each question, there was a statement from one of the characters present in the segments and the participants had to identify the speaker of the subtitle from the two given items. In freeze-frame questions, they had to identify the image in which the statement had been uttered.

Five multiple-choice questions including the images measured the participants' sound comprehension. As for emotion comprehension, five statements were given and the participants had to identify the tone or mood of the characters while uttering them in the segments.

In both sections, responses were evaluated as follows: correct answer, wrong answer, or not recalled.

### 3.4. Procedure

For collecting the data, all three groups of participants attended one session. At the beginning of the sessions, the sign language interpreter translated a formal presentation on the purpose of the research project at a general level to keep the participants motivated, being cautious not to bias the participants in any way. The interpreter also translated the follow-up questions and answers. Each group, in a room with a cinema layout, sits in a comfortable chair with eyes approximately 400 cm from the projection screen (120 inches [305 cm]). Firstly, they watched the 20-minute subtitled video segments. Soon after viewing the video, the participants began to answer Section 1. Then, the participants had a break with a drink and finger food. Following that, they watched the second 20-minute subtitled video and filled out Section 2. The overall time it took to complete the experiment was approximately 80 minutes.

### 3.5. Data analysis

To analyze the data, descriptive and inferential statistical procedures were run using IBM SPSS Statistics 27.0 to answer the research questions. The differences among the three groups were examined with one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) for quantitative variables using post hoc comparisons.

### 4. Results

To examine whether there is a significant difference between the participants attending three speeds of subtitles, a one-way ANOVA was used, considering content comprehension as the dependent variable, and speed of subtitles as the between-subject factor. According to the results, standard subtitles ($M= 13.50$, $SD= 1.95$) triggered the highest content comprehension score compared to edited ($M= 12.07$, $SD= 1.32$) and verbatim subtitles ($M= 13.34$, $SD= 2.69$). The one-way ANOVA showed a significant difference

among the three speeds in terms of participants' comprehension ($F_{(4.298)}$= 3.62, p= .03< 0.05). The post-hoc Scheffe's test revealed the place of significant difference between standard and edited subtitles (p= .04). Between-group comparisons for verbatim-standard subtitles (p= .96) and verbatim-edited subtitles (p= .07) were not significant.

As established earlier, both visual and auditory channels are necessary to guarantee viewers' full understating a movie. For this reason, image recognition was the second variable to see whether there was a significant difference between the three subtitling speeds. A one-way ANOVA analyzed the participants' recognition, with image recognition as the dependent variable and speed of subtitles as the between-subject factor. The results revealed that standard subtitles (M= 6.54, SD= 1.47) interfered with image recognition less than edited (M= 6.08, SD= 1.26) or verbatim subtitles (M= 6.08, SD= 1.197); however, this difference was not statistically significant ($F_{(2,73)}$=1.30, p= .36 >0.05).

The efficiency of techniques for other SDH parameters were assessed, depending on participants' comprehension. A one-way ANOV analyzed participants' content comprehension, with content comprehension as the dependent variable and speaker-identification techniques for scenes with multiple speakers as the between-subjects factor. The results revealed that color coding (M= 6.83, SD= 1.43) triggered the highest comprehension score compared to tagging (M= 6.04, SD= .87) and displacement (M= 6.81, SD= 1.38). The one-way ANOVA showed a significant difference between the three techniques in terms of groups' comprehension ($F_{(1.566)}$= 3.33, p= .04< 0.05). The post hoc scheff's test revealed the place of significant difference between tagging and color-coding (p= .04). Between-group comparisons for tagging and displacement (p= .07) and displacement and color-coding p= .997) were not significant.

A one-way ANOVA revealed whether there was a significant difference between the three techniques of speaker identification for scenes with multiple speakers in terms of groups' image recognition, considering image recognition as a dependent variable, and speaker identification technique as a between-subject factor. The results showed that displacement (M= 4.88, SD= 1.50) interferes with image recognition less than color-coding (M= 4.54, SD= .58) or tagging (M= 4.50, SD= .64). However, this difference was not statistically significant ($F_{(1,029)}$= 1.03, p= .33> 0.05).

A one-way ANOVA with groups' comprehension as a dependent variable and speaker identification technique as the between-subject factor showed that italic and color-coded subtitles (M= 8.71, SD= 2.19) compared to tagged subtitles (M= 8.46, SD= 2.21) or tagged subtitles in brackets (M= 7.54, SD= 1.27) caused the highest comprehension score. However, the difference was not statistically significant ($F_{(3.752)}$= 2.57, p= .08> 0.05).

A one-way ANOVA with image recognition as the dependent variable and speaker identification technique as the between-subject factor revealed that tagged subtitles (M= 8.31, SD= 1.28) had the highest comprehension score compared to tagged subtitles in brackets (M= 7.50, SD= 1.06) and italic and color-coded subtitles (M= 8.00, SD= 1.81). The one-way ANOVA showed that there were no significant differences among the three techniques ($F_{(2,001)}$= 2.15, p= .12> 0.05).

Another one-way ANOVA analyzed the groups' content comprehension, considering sound identification techniques. According to the results, icons had the highest mean score ($M$= 7.81, $SD$= 2.07) compared to labeling the source of sounds ($M$= 7.71, $SD$= 1.60) and descriptions ($M$= 7.19, $SD$= 1.13). The one-way ANOVA revealed no significant difference among the three techniques ($F_{(2,727)}$= 1.03, $p$= .36> 0.05).

The last one-way ANOVA examined the groups' comprehension of speakers' emotions. The results showed that the absence of information ($M$= 9.00, $SD$= 2.18) led to the highest comprehension score compared to descriptions ($M$= 6.85, $SD$= .96) and emoticons ($M$= 8.27, $SD$= 1.86). The one-way ANOVA showed a significant difference between the three techniques ($F_{(3.021)}$= 10.01, $P$= .000< 0.05). The post-hoc Scheffe's test showed a significant difference between the techniques of absence of information and descriptions ($p$= .000), and also between emoticons and descriptions ($p$= .012). Between-group comparisons for emoticons and the absence of information did not reveal a significant difference ($p$= .304).

## 5. Discussions

In this study, three groups of DHH people watched two consecutive segments of a movie, with each group being exposed to one variable of each SDH parameter. Various research studies have demonstrated that the optimal speed for subtitles is influenced by multiple factors, such as the visual action on screen, the complexity of vocabulary and syntax in the subtitles, the target audience of the audiovisual product, the topics covered in the video, and the genre of the content (Tamayo, 2024). As for the speed parameter, the group that used standard subtitles comprehended the content significantly better than the group that used edited subtitles. Some research with DHH participants using similar variables of speed proved standard subtitling as the optimal subtitling speed (Eugeni, 2015; Szarkowska et al., 2015; Arnáiz-Uzquiza, 2015). The excessive use of reduction techniques in edited subtitles probably led to the artificial use of language and consequently made high demands on the participants' cognitive processing (Moran, 2012). Furthermore, the reformulation used in edited subtitles reduces inter-semiotic cohesion with characters' articulatory movements that would end up in viewers' confusion and distraction (de Linde & Kay, 1999b; Ghia, 2012; Gottlieb, 2012; Jensema et al., 1996; Szarkowska et al., 2016; Szarkowska et al., 2011).

Image recognition did not appear to be affected by the subtitling speed. The participants who used verbatim subtitles with 10906 words (edited subtitles 7633 & standard subtitles 9178) did not get significantly lower scores than the participants attending edited and standard subtitles. The lack of differences was unexpected because verbatim subtitles flood the screen with a higher number of two-line subtitles (115, edited subtitles 71 & standard 82) do not usually leave enough time for viewers to look at the images (d'Ydewalle et al., 1991; Praet et al., 1990; Szarkowska & Gerber-Morón, 2019; De Bruycker & d'Ydewalle, 2003). The lack of difference in image recognition scores may be attributed to the high visual efficiency; DHH people "seem to make up for their sometimes-poor reading skills with a particularly good visual perception and comprehension" (Romero-Fresco, 2018, p. 212). Taken all together, these results suggest that the speed of subtitles did not hinder DHH viewers' attention distribution between subtitles and images, which is in line with the results of some previous research (e.g., Orero et al., 2012; d'Ydewalle & Gielen, 1992; d'Ydewalle and Pavakanun, 1997). Moreover, the evidence

suggests that the participants managed to cope with the high speed of subtitles but not the unintelligible subtitling in which the semantic relationships within and across subtitles were not clear.

However, with the small sample size, caution must be applied, as the findings might not be extrapolated to all DHH viewers and all audiovisual products. It is a widely held view that viewers' comprehension and attentional patterns are tremendously affected by other factors such as individual needs and interests, and scene complexity, among others (d'Ydewalle & Gielen, 1992; Neves, 2005; Gambier, 2003). Therefore, further exploration is still needed to examine Iranian DHH viewers' comprehension and image recognition while watching subtitled programs.

As for the speaker identification parameter, in scenes with multiple characters, color-coding as a variable triggered significantly higher comprehension scores than tagging. Experimental studies among adults and children proved color-coding as an effective technique to identify speakers on the screen Al Amin et al., 2022; AlBkower & Haider, 2023; Lorenzo, 2010; Pereaira, 2010, Tamayo, 2016; Arnáiz-Uzquiza, 2015; Eugeni, 2015; Szarkowska et al., 2015). This technique, compared to the other two variables, did not render significantly different results in terms of image recognition. The three variables of speaker identification for scenes with voice-off did not significantly differ in terms of both content comprehension and image recognition.

The users of the three techniques of sound indication did not differ significantly in terms of sound comprehension. Icons did not convey sound information as explicitly as the other two variables. At the time of data collection, the use of icons was an innovative solution to which the participants had not had any exposure. However, icons did not yield a significantly lower comprehension score than the other two variables. This result ran contrary to the evidence provided by Harkins et al. (1996), who argued that detailed and explicit descriptions would result in viewers' improved comprehension. Studies have shown that sound descriptions are an effective strategy for adults (Pereira, 2010). Conversely, among children, emoticons and drawings are the preferred methods for identifying sounds (Lorenzo, 2010; Tamayo, 2017).

Finally, as for the three variables of emotion indication, the participants surprisingly achieved the best comprehension scores using the subtitles with no emotion information. This evidence could be attributed to the fact that facial expressions were rich sources of emotional states themselves (Yang & Bhanu, 2012), and the absence of additional information left the viewers more time to notice characters' gestures and facial expressions. The same evidence was also recorded in the eye-tracking studies (e.g., Mascow, 2015; Szarkowska et al., 2015; Eugeni, 2015), which found that the absence of emotion information would cause ease of switching between images and the subtitles, resulting in viewers taking the most advantage of the images. However, emotion information is sometimes understandable only through the characters' tone of speech. In such cases, only representing the lexical and syntactic features of the dialogue and sacrificing stylistic and pragmatic elements would hide or alter the meaning of speech (Gottlieb, 2012). Incorporating emotional cues into captions is crucial for enhancing both informativeness and engagement (de Lacerda Pataca et al., 2024). Research on visualizing prosody and emotion in the captions of online meetings can enhance accessibility for DHH individuals (de Lacerda Pataca et al., 2024) which could be further

explored to advance media accessibility for DHH audiences. According to Neves (2009), deciding on the technique of spelling out the way words are spoken and expressing what comes with the tone of voice is tremendously complicated. Therefore, further exploration of how DHH viewers perceive different techniques of emotion indication might shed some light on the issue.

## 6. Conclusions

The findings of this study provided the evidence that SDH producers in Iran should avoid "removing conversational phrases that can add flavor to the text" (Mosconi & Porta, 2012, p. 120). At the same time, they should not frustrate DHH viewers with literal transcription of dialogues because standard subtitling with the removal of repetitive elements would convey the intended meaning without putting the audience through unnecessary processing effort. However, this result may vary, depending on the manner of text presentation, complexity and quantity of information, and on-screen actions (de Linde, 1995). The results obtained from the image-recognition test revealed that DHH people, despite using subtitles with different speeds, were able to look at images similarly, and the speed issue did not hinder their switching between subtitles and images.

As for speaker identification, color-coding as a useful technique, could be used with complementary approaches such as displacement and tagging in voice-off situations. Regarding sound indication, as there was no significant difference between the techniques, further studies should investigate the techniques with a larger sample size and different AV programs. The provision of speakers' emotions was considered redundant in this experiment. However, in situations where para-linguistic features are hidden from viewers, their provision is crucial if viewers are to receive an accurate perception of the characters' speech.

Delving into the effectiveness of SDH techniques would result in creating 'crafted subtitles' that blend well with the other semiotic channels to make a pleasing whole (Gottlieb, 2012). To this aim, survey studies are crucial to obtain information about DHH viewers' general opinion on SDH techniques. Eye-tracking studies would be extremely beneficial in that they would show, in subtitling in Persian, what techniques could guarantee the Iranian DHH viewers' comprehension, enjoyment, and comfort. SDH research is also needed to compare how SDH techniques help DHH viewers immerse themselves in the world displayed by the movie, as the main concern of movie producers is to engage and captivate viewers with their audiovisual products. What is more, the findings can provide food for thought when resorting to "participatory accessibility", which is concerned with involving users (i.e., DHH viewers) in product design, production, and validation in that it can provide directions for the stages in which an agile workflow can be beneficial the most (Arias-Badia et al., 2022).

This study has many strengths; however, some limitations must be addressed. First, the number of participants with mild and moderate deafness and those with post-lingual deafness was much lower than the number of participants with pre-lingual or severe and profound deafness. Second, all participants studied in special schools, although there are many DHH who benefit from mainstream schooling. Third, most participants came from the Mashhad area, which made the study unrepresentative of the entire DHH

population. Fourth, there was also a disproportional distribution of participants among age groups, with half being in the 30-39 group. Fifth, this project did not address other paralinguistic information such as accents, dialects, and interruptions because the movie segments did not contain these contents. Sixth, techniques of emotion indication and sound identification were not studied in terms of viewers' image recognition because the images were to provide the respondents with sufficient context. Seventh, the stimulus would lead to different results if it had another genre, as the research by Chapdelaine et al. (2007) provided the evidence for it. Additionally, this project could have obtained further psycho-cognitive insights into participants' perception of and reaction to SDH techniques by including eye-tracking studies. This would provide an accurate description of the impact of every subtitling technique on participants' eye movements and reading process. Finally, further studies could benefit from within-subjects design and, thus, harness the potential that such research designs could provide in terms of accessibility research within AVT (Van Hoecke et al., 2022).

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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**About the authors**

**Farzaneh Shokoohmand** has a PhD in Translation Studies from Ferdowsi Unversity of Mashhad. Her research focuses on Subtitling for the Deaf and Hard of Heading.

**Masood Khoshsaligheh** in Full Professor in Translation Studies at Ferdowsi Unversity of Mashhad. His research lies on the intersection of translation, media and intercultural communication.

# Discursive Power in the Hybrid Media System: The Case of Chinese Neologisms

**Nancy Xiuzhi Liu[1]***

University of Nottingham Ningbo China, China

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## Abstract

Discursive power is conventionally conceptualized as the power of those in control over others. This study approaches this subject from a novel perspective by proposing that such power is inherent within neologisms or Internet buzzwords in the hybrid media system. This power is rampant and omnipotent, and is exercised voluntarily by some actors to accommodate to the mass media market's demand for novelty or appeal. Situated within the framework of media systems, this qualitative discourse analysis study was conducted on the data collected from multiple sources from 2019 to 2021. It has been found that indicators of the discursive power are not just embodied in the topics, frames and speakers, but also manifested in the trends, contexts and sources of news reports. This study will contribute to knowledge by proposing that the usage patterns of neologisms characterizes the strategies deployed in both the state media and the social media for attention and power in the communication space.

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[1] https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5281-9064 | ✉ nancy.liu@nottingham.edu.cn

* School of Education and English, University of Nottingham - Ningbo China, China

## 1. Introduction

Neologism or a newly coined word that captures up-to-date changes in society has mostly been investigated from perspectives of linguistics, particularly lexicography (e.g., Klosa-Kückelhaus & Wolfer, 2019), sociolinguistics (e.g., Lei et al., 2021; Li & Huang, 2022) as well as computer mediated communication (e.g., Ji et al., 2021). As an embodiment of social change in political, economic, scientific and other aspects of social life, neologism has also been examined in communication studies, particularly in the social media (e.g., Ilic Plauc & Šetka Čilić, 2021). This study will approach the problem from the perspective of shared power system known as "hybrid media system" (Chadwick, 2017), characterized by the discursive power pooled or tethered by various parties. The system has been shifting towards both "older" and "newer" logics in the production, distribution, and consumption of news and political information (Jungherr et al., 2019).

Definition of neologism can be fluid on the ground that new words may come into existence every now and then; however, not all of them can be called neologisms. Neologisms are categorized as lexical units or meanings that emerge in a communication community in a specific period during language development (see Klosa-Kückelhaus & Wolfer, 2019). The criteria to measure whether a new word has been lexicalized and is indeed generally accepted as language norm may include an increased frequency of a neologism, its distribution, and the discourse use of the neologism. The catchword "*tang ping*" (lying flat), for example, emerged in the year 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic was rampant while many people felt anxious and helpless, not knowing what will happen and what to do for themselves. This sentiment is reflected in the newly coined word that means 'lying flat without doing anything'. Then, it has evolved into a social phenomenon whereby when people feel that stress and pressure is beyond their coping capacity, they will choose to do nothing. Furthermore, it has become a mock word when some government officials facing the severe anti-corruption campaign launched by the Communist Party of China (CPC) would choose to "lie flat". This phenomenon cannot escape the attention of policy makers; therefore, the word appeared in some policy papers and official publications, such as the State Administration under CPC in July 2022, which says, "no lying flat will be allowed in work and those who were found out will be punished." This is just one example that reflects the discursive power imbedded in such catchwords in social and political practice. Just as Yang and Tang (2018) have examined that such online discursive phenomena are often sociologically significant, and analysing them can yield interesting insights into contemporary Chinese politics, society, and culture. Therefore, this study will examine neologisms from a sociological lens through the analysis of qualitative data, focusing on their multidimensional and pluralistic features. It argues that neologisms generated by both social media and state media embed in themselves the discursive power that transcends media and penetrates politics of society.

Data of the study were collected from multiple sources from 2019 to 2021. Firstly, the neologisms were collected from the journal *Yaowen Jiaozi* that publishes top ten neologisms every year. Then, articles with the neologisms were searched in *Wisers,* the database that collects all publications in China from both state and social media. Furthermore, sample texts with some neologisms were collected from CNKI, the

database that hosts all publications in China and across the world. Qualitative thematic analysis was then conducted together with trend and context analysis to triangulate the results. Prior to that, an overview on neologism studies and media system studies will be conducted to lay the groundwork for the examination.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Neologism studies in China

The Internet-facilitated social networks, or spaces of autonomy, are largely beyond the control of governments and corporations that previously monopolized communication channels. This space of autonomy is defined as a third space with the hybrid of cyberspace and urban space (Castells, 2015). The rapidly changing and hugely innovative Internet technology has made it possible to frequently use new words (Crystal, 2011). Jing-Schmidt and Hsieh (2019) did an overview on the development of neologism in the Chinese society. They found that neologism had dated back to pre-modern times in the form of Buddhism scriptures; then it has been morphed with various political connotations of socialist China in the 20th Century until the grassroots neologism came onto the scene thanks to the Internet. By contrast, such lexical innovations were no longer initiated by learned religious ambassadors, intellectual elites, or ideological authorities, but through the creativity of grassroots language users or netizens.

More importantly, the direction of transmission no longer follows a top-down fashion through religious teaching, and by institutional means such as mass education and political propaganda; but instead, it is spread horizontally in networked grassroots communication; thus, it has opened the window of "the existential states of the everyday individual" by creating "a discursive space for ordinary netizens" (Jing-Schmidt & Hsieh, 2019, pp. 518-519). However, at the very beginning, such a phenomenon was simply rejected by the academic circle and the society on the account that it is an infringement on the "purism" of Chinese language. Presently, the landscape has changed, and people have come to realize that the position of neologisms in a language depends largely on its linguistic, social, and political situation. Although this might raise questions of purism, they are more inclined to consider it as something more tolerable and thus more acceptable.

Neologism has drawn scholarly attention from linguistics, social linguistics in particular, as well as computer mediated communication (CMC). From the linguistic perspective, examinations mainly focus on the formation and characteristics of generation (Tao, 2017; Miu & Wu, 2021; Wu et al., 2021; Du, 2020). Tao (2017) examined the topic from the language perspective by analyzing its formation and characteristics; namely, Chinese neologism have been formed by abbreviations (words, sentences, and contractions), homonyms (Chinese characters, numbers and compounds), borrowed words (Japanese, Korean, English as well as local dialects), derivational neologisms (prefix and suffix). Its characteristics of generation are quite fluid and unpredictable, i.e., generated through randomness of choice, fast speed of transmission and short-time effectiveness. Thus, neologisms have reflected the social reality through the constant changing of language, whose characteristics entail succinctness, creativeness, vividness and visualization, as well as mirroring or being outlet for social phenomena.

Li and Huang (2022) carried out an analysis on the neologisms from 2018 to 2020 from social semiotic perspective situated within the framework of framing analysis, which was developed by Goffman (1974) and operationalized by Tankard (2001) in terms of the list of frames. They have categorized the Internet hot words into six types, namely politics, economy, culture, society, life and science according to meaning. The phenomena of neologism's winking in and out of existence has also caught much attention of computer-mediated communication (CMC). Research works have been carried out in terms of hard science with solid qualitative data (Ji et al., 2021; Jiang et al., 2021). For example, Jiang et al. (2021) adopted internet-based data from Google Trends for the temporally marked popularity of neologisms in Chinese from 2008 to 2016 to model their propagation and life cycle. They found that the model of neologism in the Chinese society in terms of the development and decline based on internet usage demonstrates a rapidly rising-decaying pattern like epidemiological models.

Research has also delved into the phenomenon from communication studies. Many case studies have been carried out regarding hot words such as *diaosi* (dick string literally) (Yang et al., 2015) on the online identification construction in terms of social implications while others focus on single cases such as *zheng nengliang* (positive energy) and its spread in social media during public health crises (Han & Du 2022; Yang & Tang, 2018). In recent years, neologism has shown new properties due to rampant spread of the social media. Its transmission is no longer restrained horizontally to grassroots or the traditional top-down fashion as scholars have claimed (Jing-Schmidt & Hsieh, 2019; Wang, 2020). Wang (2020) carried out research on neologisms of fandom from rhetorical perspective in terms of metaphor and metonymy based on data collected from Weibo, a popular Chinese social media platform like Twitter or X. She vaguely alludes that such Internet neologisms generated from networked grassroots demonstrate an upward transmission direction with the potential to enter the mainstream lexicon by means of being cited by the traditional media, without going further to elaborate on how and why. Rarely the attention has been paid to the spread of neologism from a sociological perspective in a holistic manner. Therefore, this study will examine the problem by answering the question of how neologism has been evolving in the Chinese society and the relations between the state media and social media in fanning the development as such from the perspective of media system and discursive power studies.

## 2.2. Present media system in China

On November 10, 2010, *People's Daily*, the government-controlled authoritative newspaper used the headline "Jiangsu Province, *geili* (strengthen) culture to enhance the provincial power." This phenomenon was the first instance whereby the catchword "*geili*" has been adopted by a provincial newspaper. It caught the attention of netizens who posted a huge number of comments that commended such proactive adoption of a popular social media neologism. The phenomena did not escape the inquisitive eyes of the academia who went on to scrutinize the event from the perspective of sociolinguistics. They claimed that for the first time the CPC newspaper has adopted such a posh headline (Wu et al., 2021). That reflects the impact of social media on state media who resorts to certain strategies to stay relevant while it also points to the fact that words may carry power in themselves. In platforms such as social media, social

differentiation or language inequality is often blurred, that means discursive power can be called upon as a third space imbedded not just in those who have power but also those who have not.

According to Reed (2013), power as a sociological concept can have several dimensions, i.e., relational, discursive or performative. The relational dimension has its positionality mostly related to actors while the discursive is largely realized through talks, speeches, narratives, framing of issues, interactions, among others "in the intersection of perception and advantage," or which could be "constructed and construed by the significations"; furthermore the "performative" emphasizes on the outcome in the execution and the consequential (p. 194). Discursive power as the focus of this study tends to have an epistemic structure that is hermeneutic in understanding meaning as a system of signification that is "anonymous," "arbitrary" as well as "diffusible." Therefore, "in this dimension of power, capacity and domination are encoded into discourse, with the result that they are presented as diffuse, anonymous, and idiosyncratic" (Reed, 2013, p. 200). "The dimensional analysis of discourse, on the other hand, refers not to an institutional sphere of human activity but rather to a causal feature of the social world. Discursive power is potentially present, in empirically variable ways, in any sphere of activity" (Reed, 2013, p. 211). In this connection:

> *Discursive power* refers to the degree to which the categories of thought, symbolizations and linguistic conventions, and meaningful models of and for the world determine the ability of some actors to control the actions of others, or to obtain new capacities. (Reed, 2013, p. 203)

As elaborated by Jungherr et al. (2019), such discursive power over others is generally exercised by the successful introduction, amplification and maintenance of topics, frames, and speakers that other contributors pick up in their coverage. Usually, the power can be exercised episodically or routinely by specific sets of actors with its salience in discourse across media. Although the public and the audience may lend a hand in the process, their bottom-up power is sometimes oblivious and obscured. However, the hybrid media system has offered a better channel of information flows, with which comes the discursive power omnipresent in all media forms. The hybrid media system is defined as a system that is:

> built upon interactions among older and newer media logics—where logics are defined as technologies, genres, norms, behaviors, and organizational forms—in the reflexively connected fields of media and politics. Actors in this system are articulated by complex and ever-evolving relationships based upon adaptation and interdependence and simultaneous concentrations and diffusions of power. (Chadwick, 2017, p. 4).

The "hybrid media system" has challenged the power once attributed to traditional news organizations in that digital natives can produce a myriad of contents that can easily become "eyeball-catching clickbait" and prompt further clicks (Jungherr et al., 2019). This has resulted in a fundamental shift of power towards decentralized networked outlets and individuals or groups skilled in controlling the flow of information as Castells (2013) and Chadwick (2017) envisaged. Various contributors can react or engage in varying degrees to content provided by others in the media space with those more easily accessible and readily

available news outlets gaining an upper hand in the competition for attention. "Clicks" become the key whereby new and old media have grown to be interdependent.

The media system in China physically in its categorization of traditional media, internet media and mobile media seems to be like the rest of the world. Nevertheless, it is fundamentally a "closed system" with a dynamically balanced system of six forces influencing it synchronously from all the above three channels. The six forces include the government, the Party, the market, professional, individual as well as cultural (Luo, 2015). Different from the Western media markets featuring the North American model of "vertical" communication by mediating between political elites and ordinary citizens, or the Southern European elite press's involvement in a "horizontal" process of debate and negotiation among elite factions, the historical "Soviet model" residual in the Chinese media system considers the primary function of mass media as enlightening the masses and raising their support for the ruling party (Cho & Wang, 2021; Zhao, 2011). Within this system, the Chinese state dominates; henceforth, all Chinese media were regarded as the mouthpiece of the central government. With the reform and open-up initiated from the late 1970s, Chinese news media have become more diverse and have demonstrated a trend towards a hybrid model, although the party media model remains "structured in dominance" (Zhao, 2011).

The "hybrid media system" has been the instructive concept addressing this change, by focusing on the mutually dependent interconnections between various types of media organizations, actors, and publics (Jungherr et al., 2019). The discursive power in media systems may shape public discourses and controversies that unfold in interconnected communication spaces (Jungherr et al., 2019, p. 404). The transitional period with hybrid media system challenges the powers of "old" media in setting agenda or framing events, with "digital natives" eager to get their voices heard through all possible communication channels. This has led some to expect a fundamental shift in power away from hierarchically organized, internationally present commercial media organizations toward small, decentralized, networked outlets and individuals. Adding a multiplicity of power, such discursive formation explains or contributes to explaining the social actions of neologism adoption that has infused them into the power-causality link.

Henceforth, in this study, discursive power is conceptualized as the power inherently borne by neologisms whose diffusion and adoption are driven by the hybrid media system. Such power is not determined by the ability of some actors to control others, or to obtain new capacities as in power execution conventionally; but it is executed voluntarily by some actors to cater to or follow the trend of the mass market, novelty or taste. In operationalization, indicators of such an evident power are not just embodied in the topics, frames and speakers, but also manifested in the trends, contexts and sources. These indicators will be examined in the next section.

## 3. Data and analysis

Data of the study has been collected from multiple sources. Firstly, sample neologisms have been collected from the journal *yaowen jiaozi* from 2019 to 2021. Secondly, their sources and contexts have been examined with sample texts collected from Wisers, the database that collects all publications in

Chinese from both state and social media. Thirdly, published newspaper articles with some neologism samples have been collected from CNKI, the largest database in China that collects all Chinese and international publications. *Yaowen jiaozi* is a journal on Chinese language that started in 1995. It has been recognized for its rigour and meticulousness in lexicography. The journal's fame has been built on its critical analysis of language error in any kind of publications, be it print or digital. It usually publishes ten neologisms in the year past at the beginning of every New Year by synthesizing all the neologisms published in various Chinese media. Table 1 lists the top ten neologisms from 2019 to 2021, with translation added by the author.

**Table 1.** Top 10 neologisms published in *Yaowen Jiaozi*

| | |
|---|---|
| **2019** | 文明互鉴 (mutual learning between civilizations), 区块链 (block chain), 硬核 (hardcore), 融梗 (copycat), ××千万条，××第一条 (rule of thumb, safety…), 柠檬精 (green with envy), 996 (working from 9am to 9pm, six days a week), 我太难/南了 (Ist's so hard for me), (我不要你觉得，我要我觉得 (it is not about how you feel, but how I feel), 霸凌主义 (((bullying) |
| **2020** | 人民至上，生命至上 (people first, life first), 逆行者 (hero defiant of danger), 飒 (valiant), 后浪 (rising wave or young people), 神兽 (mythical creatures or naughty kids), 直播带货 (live-streaming sales), 双循环 (dual circulation), 打工人 (laborer), 内卷 (involution or rat race), 凡尔赛文学 (Versailles literature, meaning show off humbly or humblebrag) |
| **2021** | 百年未有之大变局 (profound changes unseen in a century), 小康 (well-off), 赶考 (take the imperial examinations), 双减 (double reduction, ease excessive homework burden and after class tutoring for students), 碳达峰，碳中和 (peak carbon dioxide emissions and carbon neutrality), 野性消费 (irrational buying), 破防 (break down one's defenses), 鸡娃 (tiger parenting), 躺平 (lie flat or couch potato), 元宇宙 (metaverse) |

From the data set, four words have been sampled for analysis for their wide media use, which may well illustrate how the spread of them has evolved and is still evolving. Secondly, these samples have a comparatively longer life span, which means they are still in use after three years or so. Furthermore, the database Wisers shows that these words are the ones with the highest number of usages across all media, between one and half a million to three million. Two of them 躺平 (*tangping*, lie flat, meaning without motivation to do anything) and 内卷 (*neijuan*, literally meaning involution, describes the fierce competition that people are experiencing in the society) have been identified as firstly coming into use by the social media, while 人民至上, 生命至上 (people first, life first), 小康 (well-off) have been adopted first by the state media. The published news containing the four words have been collected from CNKI, the database that hosts all newspapers published in China. Following indicators of discursive power operationalized by Jungherr et al. (2019), firstly the topics, frames and speakers will be analyzed. As the discursive power imbedded in words rather than people, more indicators including the trend, contexts and

sources will be added and illustrated as well. The searched results were restricted to the year 2021 to show that the neologisms are still in active use, which means they have a longer life span.

## 3.1. Topics

Contributors will identify or follow certain topics through a communication space whereby instances of discursive power can be exercised and identified episodically or routinely. Therefore, topic is the first indicator of discursive power that is imbued with the ability of contributors to political communication spaces to introduce, amplify, and maintain topics in political discourse (Jungherr et al., 2019). Here, in this instance, the topics are the ones that the neologisms have been adopted in the news reports as shown in Table 2. It can be comprehended that these neologisms have penetrated topics of wide concern in social, economic and political spheres.

**Table 2.** Topics of neologism in news reports

| Neologisms | Topic 1 | Topic 2 | Topic 3 | Topic 4 | Topic 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| lie flat | young people | business | leaders or cadres | all kinds of people | Internet hot word |
| involution | price war | young people | express delivery | fierce competition | involution |
| well-off | all-round well-off | well-off society in full scale | going for well-off | Xi Jinping General Secretary | well-off life |
| put people and life first | people first | epidemic prevention | health and safety | safety production | flood prevention |

## 3.2. Frames

Media texts are centered around certain frames by serving the purpose of organizations behind them. Frames are the central defining strategies embedded in political texts through the selection and salience that may systematically or symbolically organize the social world (Entman, 2004; Reese, 2003; Liu, 2019). Framing events can affect people's interpretation and consumption of related topics or political issues. Frames embodied in texts are thus relevant aspects of discursive power, as public contestation is largely about which frames apply to specific issues or episodes (Jungherr et al., 2019). Frames can be adopted episodically and routinely or thematically in reports, being episodic means "event-based" centering around a prevalent issue while being thematic means having a "broader perspective" that may report an issue in the context of collective outcome, public policy debates or historical trends (Iyengar, 1994, p. 18).

In the sampled year of 2021, taking "relevance" as the sorting cue by looking into the top 20 newspaper articles in CNKI, frames related to social life in terms of political, economic, or cultural aspects were coded as "thematic," while other frames such as a company or product were categorized as "episodic" as presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Frames of neologism in news reports

| Neologisms | Total articles | Episodic frames | Thematic frames |
|---|---|---|---|
| lie flat | 42 | 35% | 65% |
| involution | 123 | 40% | 60% |
| well-off | 853 | 15% | 85% |
| put people and life first | 37 | 10% | 90% |

## 3.3. Speakers

Topics or frames must be presented by speakers who may represent competing factions, organizations, and viewpoints to be recognized in communication spaces. Traditional news organizations usually feature quotes by politicians or pundits and representatives of think-tanks supporting a position favored by the outlet (Jungherr et al., 2019). In the case of the neologism samples, it can be said that "words speak louder than people" where the two generated from the social media are widely adopted by the state media while the other two generated by the state media have also been used by the social media, sometimes derisively, though. More details can be referred to in the next section.

The three sections above only presented the data from the state media. For data from social media accounts that used such neologisms, the search and retrieval are relatively sophisticated because such platforms only support search results within the past seven days or restricted within a day or two. They are mostly designed for key words used synchronically in posts to navigate streaming or trends. To compensate for this shortage of social media posts, Wisers Search database has been used to capture the number of usages in both the state media and social media. The result is further elaborated in the following sections.

## 3.4. Trend of neologism usage

Through data collected from Wisers on 14 March 2023, I compared the data from 1 January to 31 December 2021 for consistency. The comparison is based on the data from official media at various levels including their websites and apps, to social media such as WeChat (most popular Chinese social media platform), Weibo (Chinese version of Twitter) and BBS (Bulletin Board System, similar to chat rooms where people with similar interests gather). Media contents and contexts including all publications in general topics as well as finance and management and others were compared and presented below.

This group of figures in Figure 1 presents the number of captures and report trends in 2021 of the four words, whereby the two charts at the top are *tangping* and *neijuan* originated from the social media and the two charts below them are 人民至上, 生命至上 (people first, life first), 小康 (well-off) that have been firstly adopted by the state media.

**Figure 1.** Report trends of the four neologisms



躺平 (lie flat)



内卷 (rat race)
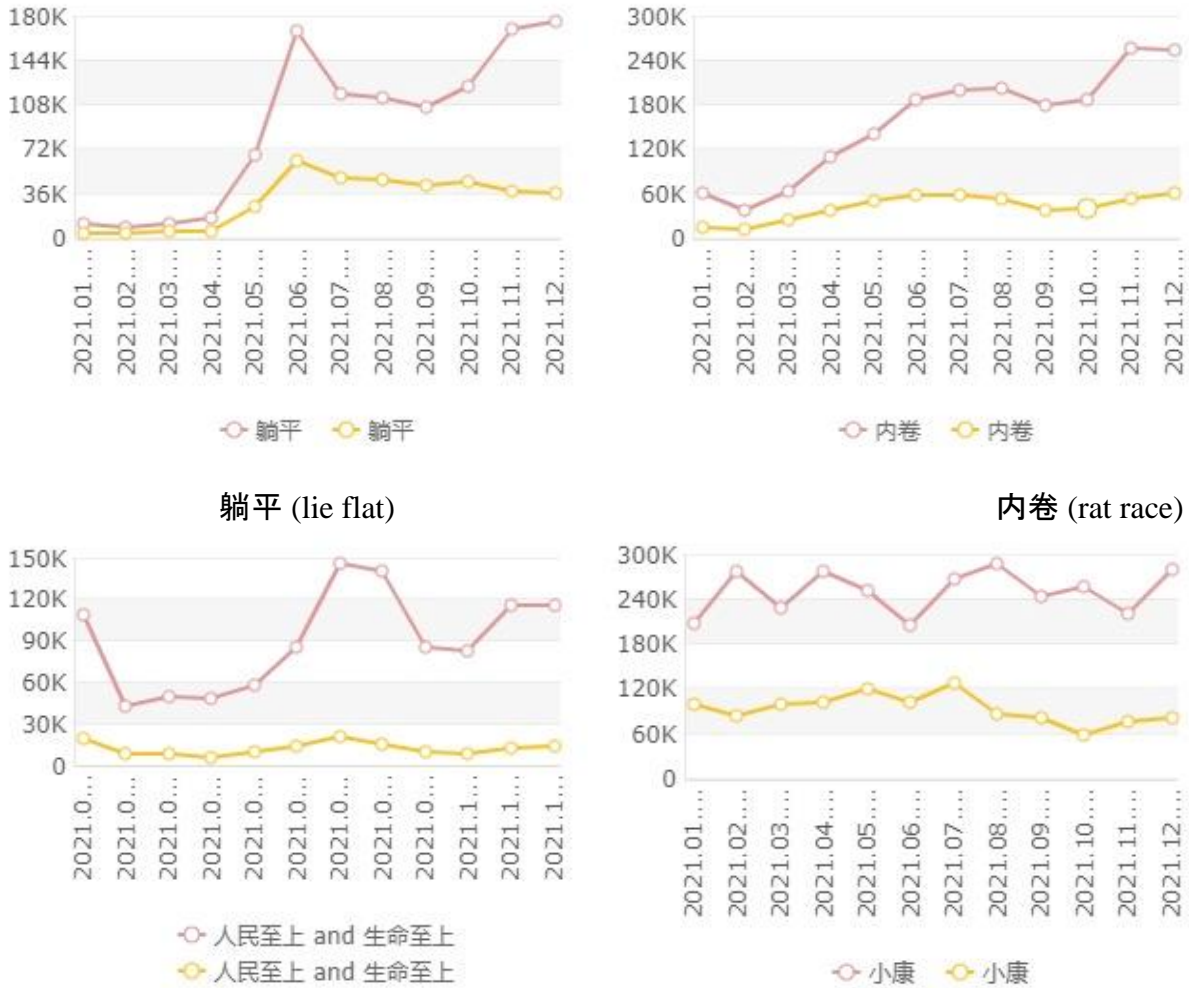




人民至上, 生命至上 (people first, life first)　　　　　小康 (well-off)

In these charts, the top line is the number of usages that shows the trend in the state media while the lower line represents that in the social media. The social media generated neologisms show an upward trend of usage in the state media while the state media generated ones are also adopted by the social media, but to a much lesser extent. The discursive power (indiscernible maybe) of the neologisms from the social media is quite evident, which exhibits that the state media have made efforts to cater themselves to consumptions of the public.

### 3.5. Contexts of neologism usage

Contexts of the four neologisms where they generally occurred are by and large in similar topics as analyzed in the section under "Topics" as is shown in the group of word clouds in Figure 2.

**Figure 2.** Word clouds of the four neologisms



From the word clouds of the neologisms in Figure 2, in the same order as in Figure 1, we can see that *tangping* is mostly used in some formal or business posts that encourages teams or staff not to "lie flat," but to pull up their socks while condemning such inactions during the COVID-19 pandemic. In social media, the context is more or less similar. It is used when talking about people's livelihood and life attitude. *Neijuan* is by and large the same, where it is used mostly in describing the contexts of competition in education and daily life experiences in both the state media and the social media. The usages of the other two "people first, life first" and "well-off" are in similar scenarios: The former is a slogan publicized by the government during the COVID-19 epidemic and is used in both media types as such, concerning some macro level of the country and society in terms of development and construction. The latter is used in some government publications to describe the society as a whole and vision of people's lives while in social media posts, it is used in the similar vein, pertinent to Xi Jinping the president, environment, rejuvenation and so forth.

### 3.6. Sources of posts

While the length of posts is usually longer in the state media than in social media, the apps of state media and social media accounts take the lion's share in all sources of posts. Take *tangping* as an example (Figure 3), the other three are similar in their pie charts; therefore, they will not be presented (available upon request).
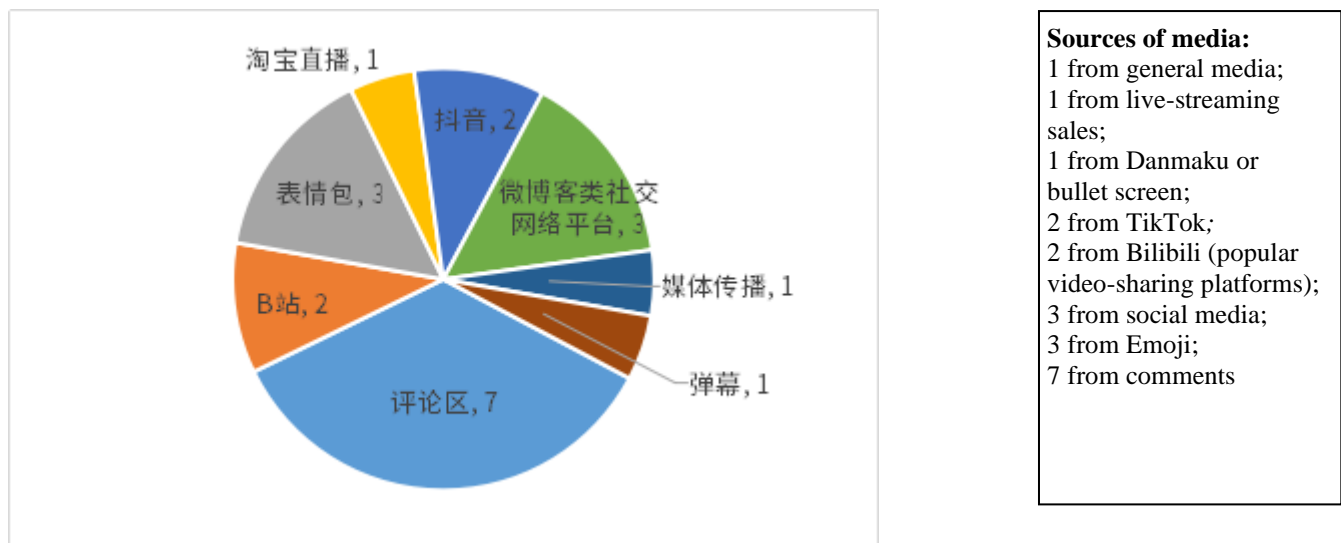
**Figure 3.** Sources of posts



On the left pie chart in Figure 3, web posts took up almost all posts, 1.1 million to be exact, while newspapers only numbered 33 thousand. On the right one, social media took up 275k, BBS 113.1k and Weibo 3.9k.

The channel of communication is mostly through the popular social media such as the *Taobao* live-streaming, the popular online shopping platform, or video-sharing platforms such as *Bilibili* and *TikTok*, and more from comments that follow some posts (see Figure 4 for detailed number from different sources). The sources are quite diverse, which include both the state media and the social media, with more from the latter.

**Figure 4.** Number of neologisms generated by various sources[1] []



**Sources of media:**
1 from general media;
1 from live-streaming sales;
1 from Danmaku or bullet screen;
2 from TikTok*;*
2 from Bilibili (popular video-sharing platforms);
3 from social media;
3 from Emoji;
7 from comments

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[1]. Report from https://www.eefung.com/hot-report/20191115163103 (accessed 24/10/2022)

## 4. Discussion

As observed by scholars, relationships between media organizations and sources vary systematically. Such relationships in the context of contemporary media systems merit reexamination. In addition, the role of publics and audiences in the flow of information varies in political communication spaces, which is an area that would bear fruitful results through the conceptual application of information flows and discursive power (Jungherr et al., 2019; Reese, 2010; Entman, 2007). In the unique case of China where social media has developed in a blocked Internet environment, the hybridity of public and private in the Chinese media system highlights another dimension of state governance, in which the Chinese mainstream media have taken a series of reforms to adapt themselves to social media culture (Shao & Wang, 2017). Fostering cultural affinity, in affable style (*jie diqi* in Chinese), the positive effects of social media on reducing state's control of information and encouraging the development of civic engagement have been constantly identified by scholars in China and elsewhere such as Malaysia and North Africa (Shao & Wang, 2017). Li and Huang (2022), the associate editor of *People's Daily* and the president of People.com.cn, stressed the need to ''regard the user as the most important resource, regard users' information to be a great wealth, and regard satisfying the audience's needs as the basic starting point.'' According to Shao and Wang (2017), on 18 August 2014, the central government promulgated the guidance on the promotion of convergence development of traditional media and new media. Following that, the State Council promulgated ''Internet +'' action in 2015, which was formally proposed in the Government Work Report. The policy intervention in the media market indicates an integration process between the online media and national governance. According to "the National Governance Report on New Media Studies," 300,000 messages had been posted on Weibo by Central Government institutions alone in 2020 with accesses of over 230 million [translation by author].[2] All such approaches indicate that the Chinese government has started to use the social media as a new public management instrument, realizing that social media can be a safety valve to release social tensions, anticipate social risks, and handle reform conflicts (Noesselt, 2014). Such efforts have further validated the existence of discursive power inherently residing in neologisms that have been more widely adopted by the state media to present themselves as affable and inclusive in their news coverage. Although the physical power of such words may be pertained to some unknown public entity, the somewhat invisible power embodied in such words are irresistible and enticing discursively.

According to the Report on the Communication of Internet Neologisms 2019 produced by the software company called Eefung (蚁坊软件), a company that follows the media closely on various releases and compiles reports on many topics, the top 20 neologisms of 2019 were mostly generated from popular films or shows, news and hot issues, celebrities, social media, as well as netizens' self-mockery (refer to Figure 4 for details).[3]

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[2]. https://wenku.baidu.com/view/ae0d69120440be1e650e52ea551810a6f524c84c.html?_wkts_=1681199475786
[3]. The report is available at https://www.eefung.com/hot-report/20191115163103 (accessed 24/10/2022).

The currency of the present media system, from commercial advertising to politics, is more about the ability to attract attention than the ability to communicate (Zhang et al., 2018). The case of China is even more so; as observed by Yang and Tang (2018), "contemporary China's Internet is a carnivalesque space where neologisms, newfangled catchphrases and outlandish visual/textual memes get constantly invented, go viral, and then go out of fashion just as quickly." The position of neologisms in a language depends heavily on its linguistic, social and political situation (Marello, 2020). For example, Li (2017) examined the topic on the "characteristics and social impact of the use of social media by Chinese *dama"* (auntie, meaning middle aged women in general) from the perspective of anthropological linguistics which is concerned with form and use of language in different cultures and to what extent the development of language has been influenced by cultural environment. Therefore, it is difficult to confine the study on the civil society under a single theoretical framework in mapping out the complexities of Chinese social media, the existence of neologism in this case.

Results from the study have found that the discursive power in China reinforced by the political system of authoritarian China is multifaceted rather than an integrated or fragmented binary. Reflected in the case of neologism usage in the Chinese context, it is diffused in all events or politics of everyday life. Such discursive power resides in the political communication space that dominates attention in ongoing political discourse in the two-level systems of "political parallelism" and "regulatory environment" (Reed, 2013; Jungherr et al., 2019). This omnipotent discursive power has created a third realm of the public sphere (Habermas, 1985; Huang, 1993) in which all the game-players will contribute to as well as nurture its growth and evolution. This in turn contributes to authoritarian-based governance (Yongnian & Joseph, 2008) as well as empowering individual actors in contemporary media systems (Kleis Nielsen & Ganter, 2018). The Internet connection has brought about the otherwise fragmentized structure of society into an integrated power game process where consensus or synchronization might be achieved more easily. In this process, differentiation or dissociation between the state and social media has become obsolete while accommodation and absorption have become the key. Such accommodation and absorption are realized through the execution of power embedded in neologisms as one of the channels.

Neologisms or catchwords in a society are one of the conduits that reflect what people have on their minds in their daily experiences or encounters; thus, they can mirror the prominent social issues or phenomena. For example, the English portmanteau 'shitizen', *pimin* in Chinese captures a widely shared sense of powerlessness and disenfranchisement felt by ordinary Chinese citizens (Yang et al., 2015). Language as the conduit of communication, bearing the brunt of all sorts of exchanges between individuals or groups or organizations, is the primary channel that embodies the inherent power of influence that has been mostly ignored or gone unnoticed. Neologisms, whose evolvement and adoption are intertwined with the development of language, are the vehicles where discursive power can be substantiated through interaction and engagement in the media.

## 5. Conclusion

Irrespective of the dimensions of power, discursive power is usually produced and executed through actors at various stages. The hybrid media system has materialized the possibility that such power can be generated and executed by some invisible and indiscernible forces. Such an invisible power is permeated through the rampant spread and approval of neologisms in the media. The otherwise unknown or relatively hedged source of discursive power interacts and engages with society through both social media and state media in present-day society. Such power may evolve into something with potential and promises for a space acknowledged by both the governing authority and the public. It may develop and resonate with social, political, economic and cultural powers to radiate its far-reaching societal implications.

Neologisms ebb and flow as time elapses. For new words, dictionaries then function as a gatekeeper that testifies whether the word can find its place there. The word *Xiaokang* (well-off) has been lexicalized in the *Xinhua Dictionary*, the most exclusive Chinese dictionary. The rapid diffusion of new media has transformed the supply of information. There is a much wider range of media choices on offer, providing much greater variability in the available information. The existence of such a third space with unknown novelties sometimes means that the mainstream media can no longer confine itself to rigid language choices while the social media cannot assert itself as maverick or unorthodox. The present-day media environment in the Chinese society has become a public sphere (Habermas, 1985; Huang, 1993), mostly online, that is comprised of citizens, news media and government who compete for attention. The landscape toward neologisms has shifted from one that was filled with repulsion or rejection to inclusion and involvement, with the positioning shift from the once control and command to the trend of assimilation and integration. These are all abundant evidence that point to the fact that neologism encompasses the discursive power in various channels of news dissemination that is irresistible and unstoppable.

The adoption of affable or down-to-earth (*jiediqi*) style by using more neologisms originating from social media reflects the changing attitude of the government, which has resorted to using social media as a new public management instrument. It highlights its resolution and action to maintain communicative bonds with the public and explains why neologisms generated in social media have found more usages in the state media. On the other hand, some words generated by the state media have also penetrated social media with their discursive power uncontested.

Accordingly, it could be interesting to delve further into the study of neologisms in other multimedia contexts such as fan game localization groups (e.g., Chen, 2023; Zoraqi & Kafi, 2023), and literary neologisms (e.g., Attfield, 2023). These will contribute to a more fruitful strand of research where new perspectives can be gained about the interplay between discursive powers and the conceivably norm-breaking fan practices (Zoraqi & Kafi, 2023).

**Disclosure statement**

**Acknowledgement**

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**About the authors**

**Nancy Xiuzhi Liu** has a PhD in Intercultural Communication and is currently Associate Professor in Translation Studies at School of Education and English, University of Nottingham Ningbo China. Her research mainly focuses on sociocultural meanings of translation and media discourse analysis. She has published extensively in the areas of translation, media, city branding, mobile studies and cultural studies.

# From Independence to Involvement: The Case of Politeness Strategy in Chinese-English Business Interpreting

## Jiaqi Xue[1*]

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong

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## Abstract

This article examines the utilization of politeness strategies in a Chinese-English business interpreting. With the independence politeness strategy and involvement politeness strategy as frameworks, a case study was carried out to analyze the politeness strategies employed by an interpreter in a Chinese-English business interpreting scenario. The results of the study indicate that the interpreter tends to transition from the independence politeness strategy in the source text to the involvement politeness strategy in the target text. More specifically, the interpreter appears to convert the independence politeness strategy employed by the Chinese speaker into the involvement politeness strategy in the English rendering. Furthermore, it is suggested that the interpreter's manipulation might be deemed acceptable based on the type of rendering and the purpose of interpreting. Overall, this study can not only shed light on the usage of politeness strategy in intercultural business negotiation interpreting, but also expand the application of politeness strategy in interpreting studies. It also provides some practical implications for the politeness strategies employed in intercultural communication.

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[1] iD https://orcid.org/0009-0006-2692-9143 | ✉ jqxue00@126.com

[*] Faculty of Humanities, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

## 1. Introduction

In the era of economic globalization and integration, there is a booming commercial and business connection between China and the rest of the world. In fact, "strategic alliances with Chinese companies have become an important value-creating strategy for many Western companies" (Duysters et al., 2007, p. 109). It is reported that the cooperation between Chinese companies and foreign ones is playing an essential role in the development of global as well as national economies (Maze & Chailan, 2020; Zhou, 2008).

Effective intercultural communication is essential for successful business cooperation with companies from various nations, and interpreting plays a critical role in enabling face-to-face negotiations (Kondo et al., 1997). It is important to note that "the interpretation's quality may affect the process and result of business activity directly" (Jing, 2017, p. 37). In fact, the word "quality" here should be understood in a broader sense: It not only indicates that interpreters who are responsible for the progress of communication should play their part to help both parties overcome the language barriers but also to maintain face, which "in the increasingly multilingual international business community is becoming a major issue to be solved" (Scollon et al., 2012, p. 46). The concept of face, or *mianzi* 面子 in Chinese, was initially introduced by the Chinese anthropologist Hu Hsien and later incorporated into the study of communication by Goffman (1981). Within the context of intercultural communication, face is primarily seen as a politeness strategy that balances two distinct approaches: independence versus involvement, often referred to as "a paradox of face" (Scollon et al., 2012, p. 48).

Interpreting is a distinct form of intercultural communication where issues of face merit special consideration (Cho, 2021). Despite its importance, to date, scant research has focused on this subject, and the practical application of politeness strategies, i.e., independence and involvement, is rarely observed in existing literature (Gan, 2015; Xu, 2017). Moreover, current studies (e.g., Felberg & Saric, 2017; Ren, 2010) tend to examine whether interpreters should uphold politeness rather than delving into the methods they employ to maintain it throughout the interpreting process. As such, this study is designed to explore the application of politeness strategies in business interpreting, specifically within the context of a Chinese-English business negotiation. By leveraging the concepts of independence and involvement as politeness strategies, the research aims to uncover how these strategies are utilized by interpreters to maintain the face of the parties involved. Overall, it is hoped that this study can not only contribute to the theoretical application of politeness strategies, but also provide valuable insights into their practical implementation and the preservation of face during intercultural business interactions.

## 2. Review of the related literature

### 2.1. Independence and involvement as politeness strategies

The utilization of politeness strategies can trace its origins back to the notion of face, which is "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a

particular contact" (Goffman, 1967, p. 5). This concept is further refined as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" by Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 61). They delineate face into two distinct aspects: positive face and negative face. Positive face is described as "the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others"; in contrast, negative face refers to "the want of every competent adult member that his actions be unimpeded by others" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 62). It is worth noting that face can be either maintained or jeopardized in communication or personal interaction. Therefore, it is in the best interest of individuals to engage in cooperative behaviors during interactions. In this regard, Brown and Levinson (1987) proposed that face-maintenance objectives can be accomplished through the employment of politeness strategies.

Drawing on previous research, Scollon et al. (2012) introduce novel concepts known as independence and involvement as developments of the positive and negative face framework. The definitions of these concepts are as follows:

> The independence aspect of the face emphasizes the individuality of the participants. It emphasizes their right not to be completely dominated by group or social values, and to be free from the impositions of others. The involvement aspect of the face is concerned with the person's right and needs to be considered a normal, contributing, or supporting member of society. (p. 48)

Based on the definitions, the independence strategy focuses on highlighting the individual's distinctiveness or uniqueness within a larger group. On the other hand, the involvement politeness strategy emphasizes finding common ground between the speakers and listeners during communication. These concepts can be better illustrated with specific examples that demonstrate different linguistic features.

Linguistic strategy of independence:

> 1) I don't know if you will want to send this by air mail or by speed post.
> 2) I just need to borrow a little piece of paper; any scrap will do.
> 3) I don't suppose you'd know the time, would you?
> 4) Mr. Lee, there's a phone call for you.

Linguistic strategy of involvement:

> 1) You always do so well in school.
> 2) All of us here at City University …
> 3) Are you feeling better today?
> 4) I think we should be able to finish that annual report very quickly.
>
> (Scollon et al., 2012, pp. 51-52)

Research grounded in the concepts of independence and involvement politeness strategies has been conducted within specific communicative contexts, particularly within the realm of refusal discourse (Félix-Brasdefer, 2006; Ren & Woodfield, 2016). It is suggested that individuals tend to favor the involvement politeness strategy over the independence politeness strategy in refusal utterances, as it

emphasizes the common ground between the listener and the speaker (Scollon et al., 2012). Moreover, these politeness strategies have been employed to compare different languages and elucidate preferences for various politeness strategies across linguistic contexts (Callahan, 2011; Félix-Brasdefer, 2008; Sun et al., 2021).

It is important to acknowledge that the independence and involvement politeness strategies have exhibited relatively considerable applicability and adaptability in relevant research. However, it is noteworthy that the majority of these studies are confined to monolingual settings, which somewhat narrows the scope of their application. In other words, the exploration of how politeness strategies are utilized in intercultural communication involving multiple languages as well as the transfer of languages has been largely overlooked.

## 2.2. Politeness strategies in interpreting

The 21st century has witnessed the rapid advancements of globalization and economic integration, where cross-language interpreting plays an increasingly vital role in international affairs. This includes critical areas such as issues addressed by the United Nations (Baigorri Jalón & Barr, 2004) and the COVID-19 pandemic (Bachelier & Orlando, 2024), to name but a few. In fact, interpreting is intrinsically linked to intercultural communication, serving as an essential facilitator for dialogues between individuals who speak different languages and hail from diverse cultural backgrounds (Hlavac & Xu, 2020; House, 2020). Within this domain, the role of politeness strategies in interpreting has been scrutinized, particularly concerning the face of interpreters. Studies have found that interpreters are mindful of their own face to avoid disruptions and to faithfully convey the utterances of the parties involved (Jacobsen, 2008; Monacelli, 2009). Consequently, a form of "self-preservation" is often engaged during the interpreting process (Monacelli, 2009, p. 24). This protective stance might be largely influenced by the pursuit of equivalence between the source and target texts in translation and interpreting practices (Newmark, 1982; Ricoeur, 2006; Zhu, 2021). As a result, even professional interpreters may minimize or exclude the use of politeness strategies as a means of self-protection in business interpreting (Ren, 2010). Conversely, Felberg and Saric (2017) contend that "according to interpreters' retrospective reflections, politeness seems to be a ruling norm in interpreter-mediated institutional encounters in Norway" (p. 14). This perspective is thought to gain prominence alongside the increasing visibility of interpreters and translators (Venuti, 2018). There are, therefore, divergent views on how interpreters maintain face during the interpreting process. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the focus of existing research tends to be on the decision-making of interpreters concerning politeness strategies rather than on the face of the communication parties themselves. In other words, current research places greater emphasis on interpreter's face in relation to politeness strategies rather than on the face of those engaged in the communication.

In fact, "though politeness is a ubiquitous and prominent phenomenon in interpreter-mediated events, there is an obvious paucity of studies focusing exclusively on politeness-related issues in interpreting" (Xiang et al., 2020, p. 233). Moreover, the literature reveals a limited application of independence and

involvement politeness strategies, with notable exceptions being the works of Xu (2017) and Gan (2015). Xu (2017) introduces the concepts of independence and involvement in business negotiations and points out that the involvement politeness strategy should be more utilized in this situation; nevertheless, the concrete application of these concepts is not thoroughly explored in his study. In addition, the notions of independence and involvement offer valuable perspectives for the fields of translation and interpreting studies. Gan (2015) examines and interprets the fundamental concept of domestication versus foreignization translation strategies through the lens of independence and involvement. While it is true that these concepts are still predominantly viewed through a binary perspective, his interpretation injects fresh insights into translation and interpreting studies, fostering a more nuanced understanding of strategies grounded in communication principles.

Although the studies mentioned above have provided valuable insights, there are still several limitations that need to be addressed. To begin with, it is important to recognize that the application of independence and involvement politeness strategies has been predominantly within monolingual contexts, which somewhat limits the scope of these concepts. Intercultural communication involves the exchange of different languages and typically occurs in bilingual or multilingual settings. Therefore, examining how politeness strategies are employed to facilitate communication between parties from diverse backgrounds is a topic worthy of further exploration. Additionally, much of the existing research (e.g., Jacobsen, 2008; Ren, 2010) on politeness strategies in interpreting focuses on the role of interpreters, investigating whether they should convey the politeness present in the source text. However, these studies often overlook the parties involved, who are the primary subjects of communication. Intercultural communication is defined as the interaction between individuals from two distinct cultures or between individuals whose cultural perceptions and symbol systems are different enough to influence the communication event (Chen & Starosta, 1998; Samovar et al., 2016). In essence, the effective communication of the parties involved might be more central to interpreting.

Particularly, in business negotiations that involve companies from diverse countries, politeness strategies employed can significantly impact the outcome of the communication, making the preservation of face for both parties a vital consideration (Jansen & Janssen, 2010). Therefore, the way in which interpreters utilize politeness strategies during the interpreting process deserves scrutiny. A deeper understanding of this aspect of interpreting can offer valuable insights into how interpreters manage the intricacies of intercultural communication and play a role in the success of the interaction. As such, this study seeks to address the following two research questions:

1) How is the independence and involvement politeness strategy employed by an interpreter in Chinese-English business interpreting?

2) Does the utilization of independence and involvement politeness strategies exceed the responsibility of an interpreter in business interpreting?

## 3. Method

In this study, a qualitative approach, that is, a case study design, was utilized in that this approach can "provide a rich and vivid description of events within the case" and touches more "upon particular individual actors or groups of actors and their perceptions" (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 317). Adopting a single-case holistic design, this research examined a real business negotiation between a Chinese company and a UK enterprise.

The negotiation involves a Suzhou-based Chinese company specializing in sodium-ion batteries seeking to establish a partnership with a British counterpart. The British company is a leading one in the energy industry and an early innovator in the development and mass production of sodium-ion batteries. The potential collaboration aims to provide the Chinese host company with advanced technology and equipment while granting the British firm access to the vast Chinese market.

The business interpreting conducted by a professional interpreter from the host company was video recorded for a duration of one and a half hours and subsequently transcribed with the explicit consent of all involved parties. It is important to note that any information pertaining to commercial confidentiality, such as pricing, costs, and cooperation methods, has been omitted from the transcript. In accordance with ethical imperatives elucidated by De Costa (2016, 2019), a conscientious effort was made to uphold the integrity of the research process. To this end, two female native Chinese-speaking colleagues from the host company, possessing a commendable proficiency in English, were asked to meticulously review and refine the transcribed data prior to analysis. Their contribution not only can bolster the accuracy of the transcription but also serves as a safeguard against potential oversights or inaccuracies, thus aligning with the ethical standards upheld by the study.

## 4. Results

During the one and a half hours of interpreting, it is found that the interpreter tends to transition the independence politeness strategy employed by the Chinese speaker into the involvement politeness strategy in the English renditions. This shift is evident in several scenarios encountered during the rendering process.

**Scenario 1**

At the beginning of the negotiation, the Chinese speaker attempted to introduce the company:

*Speaker:* Z 公司是国家支持发展的科技型企业，目前已获批专利 20 多项。

    (*Z gong si shi guo jia zhi chi fa zhan de ke ji xing qi ye mu qian yi. huo pi zhuan li 20 duo xiang*.)

*Literal translation:*

> Company Z is a technology-based enterprise supported by the state and has obtained more than 20 patents.

*Interpreter:*

> As you know, Z company is a nationally supported scientific and technological company, and more than 20 patents have been approved.

The Chinese speaker, to maintain a certain level of formality and distance, opts for the independence politeness strategy by referring to "Z company" as the subject in her discourse. However, the interpreter, in the process of rendering, introduces a subtle yet significant shift in tone by adding the clause "as you know". This addition marks a transition from a purely independence-oriented approach to one that incorporates an involvement politeness strategy. In fact, this phrase serves multiple functions in discourse, notably its communicative role. According to Ostman (1981), this utterance signals the speaker's intention for the listeners to recognize the propositional content of the speech as common knowledge. When placed at the beginning of the sentence, the pharase "you know" "performs a declarative purpose and is used to urge confirmation from the addressee about the information given in the early part in the utterance" (Ostman, 1980, p. 20). Similarly, Muller (2005) notes that this phrase encourages the listener's engagement, both mentally and physically, in the conversation, enhancing personal interaction. In this scenario, where fostering rapport and trust is essential for achieving successful outcomes, the strategic inclusion of "as you know" serves to familiarize listeners with the company's introduction, implying a mutual understanding between the parties involved. Furthermore, this approach of involvement could significantly diminish the perceived distance between the parties, thereby cultivating an atmosphere conducive to negotiation.

**Scenario 2**

During the negotiation process, the Chinese speaker aimed to touch upon the cooperation field and cooperation perspective:

**(1)**

*Speaker:*

> 贵公司及我公司将来主要在钠离子电池的开发及量产上进行合作研发。
>
> (*Gui gong si ji wo gong si jiang lai zhu yao zai na li zi dian chi de kai fa ji liang chan shang jin xing he zuo yan fa.*)

*Literal translation:*

Your company and our company will mainly carry out cooperative research and development in the development and mass production of sodium-ion batteries in the future.

*Interpreter:*

Our cooperation will lie in the development and mass production of sodium-ion batteries in the future.

**(2)**

*Speaker:*

希望贵我两公司的合作能够有效推动中国钠离子电池发展，助力世界碳中和。

(*Xi wang gui wo liang gong si de he zuo neng gou you xiao tui dong zhong guo na li zi dian chi fa zhan, zhu li shi jie tan zhong he*.)

*Literal translation:*

I hope that your company's and my company's cooperation can effectively promote the development of sodium-ion batteries in China and help the world become carbon-neutral.

*Interpreter:*

I hope that our cooperation will promote the development of sodium-ion batteries in China and make our efforts toward carbon neutrality in the whole world.

In these given scenarios, the Chinese speaker employs an independence strategy, deliberately distinguishing between the host company and its counterpart using two Chinese characters: *gui* 贵 (greatness) and *wo* 我 (we). In her remarks, she demonstrates a keen awareness of politeness in business negotiation by using the character *gui* 贵 (greatness), which is a traditional honorific in Chinese culture, often used in formal settings to express respect and courtesy towards others. According to *Ci Hai* Online (2019), one of the semantic potentials of the character *gui* 贵 (greatness) refers to something with high status, e.g., *gui guo* 贵国 (your great country), which can exhibit respect for the country with superiority. However, based on the concept of register put forward by Halliday (1976, p. 22, emphasis in the original), *"the linguistic features that are typically associated with a configuration of situational features - with particular values of the field, mode and tenor - constitute a REGISTER"*. In these instances, the Chinese speaker seems to overlook the impact of "register", particularly the "tenor", which relates to the relationship between the speaker and the audience. Given that the speaker and listeners do not share the same language or cultural background, her use of this typical Chinese independence strategy may not effectively convey politeness to her audience. Conversely, the interpreter adopts a direct involvement politeness strategy by using the phrase "our cooperation". This approach serves to bridge the gap between

the speaker and the audience, fostering a more intimate atmosphere and reducing the social distance between them.

**Scenario 3**

After concluding the negotiation, a basic cooperation agreement was reached, and the British representatives were invited to share a meal. However, being their first visit to Suzhou, they were entirely unfamiliar with the local food culture. It was observed that the delegates frequently engaged in private conversations with little interaction with their hosts. This behavior, while noticeable, is quite understandable as "food plays an important role in Chinese culture—few regional cultures are as food-oriented as China" (Liang et al., 2021, p. 2394). Suzhou as an ancient city with a history of over 2000 years, is celebrated for its distinctive culinary traditions (Gan, 2014). Amidst this backdrop, a period of silence ensued, punctuated only by polite smiles from both parties. It was at this juncture that the interpreter proactively intervened to alleviate the awkwardness:

*Interpreter:*

> Do you know this cuisine (point to one cuisine), Mr. Baker, it is called "*song shu gui yu* 松鼠桂鱼 (*squirrel mandarin fish)*", do you have similar cuisine?

*Hearer:*

> Sorry? Squirrel?

*Interpreter:*

> Yes! Squirrel! Manager Yang was born in Suzhou, and she is willing to explain and tell the interesting history of it.

Then, the interpreter talked to the speaker in Chinese, and she started to introduce the cuisine to the hearer.

In this specific scenario, the interpreter employs an involvement politeness strategy by initiating a question about food from different countries, aiming to dissolve the silence between the two parties. This action demonstrates a level of subjectivity and extends beyond the traditional role of an interpreter as merely a facilitator of communication. Essentially, the interpreter steps into the role of a conversation host, introducing a new topic that enables both parties to continue their interaction seamlessly.

However, some may argue that the interpreter has overstepped his professional boundaries, given that interpreters are often expected to act as a transmission belt, translating machine, or conduit, merely conveying messages without adding personal input (Cheung, 2012; Inghilleri, 2003). This concern will be explored further in the subsequent section.

**Scenario 4**

After dinner, both parties bid farewell at the gate of the restaurant.

*Speaker:*

感谢贝克先生莅临我公司，期待今后合作！

(*Gan xie bei ke xian sheng li lin wo gong si, qi dai jin hou he zuo!*)

*Literal translation:*

Thank you, Mr. Baker, for visiting my company and look forward to future cooperation!

*Interpreter:*

Looking forward to our future cooperation and thank you for your visit!

In this scenario, the Chinese speaker employs customary methods to conclude the conversation, notably through expressions of gratitude and goodwill. A particular honorific, *lilin* 莅临 (respectable visit), is used to express respect and to impart a sense of importance to the visit. Throughout the interaction, it is found that from the beginning to the end, this Chinese speaker often utilizes the independence politeness strategy, taking the position of "-P (power) +D (distance)" (Scollon et al., 2012, p. 58) into consideration. In fact, "in such a system, they would treat each other as equals and use a relatively high concentration of independence politeness strategies out of respect for each other" (Scollon et al., 2012, p. 58). However, in intercultural communication, there is often a disparity in the shared understanding or knowledge between speakers and listeners. Recognizing this, the interpreter modifies the sentence structure and adopts an involvement politeness strategy by incorporating the phrase "our future cooperation". This adjustment demonstrates respect on behalf of the speaker and enhances mutual understanding and respect, as the involvement strategy effectively narrows the social distance between the speaker and the audience.

Overall, these four scenarios offer a snapshot of the progression of this business negotiation. It has been observed that, throughout the rendering process, the interpreter frequently transitions from the independence politeness strategy employed by the Chinese speaker to an involvement politeness strategy in the English renditions.

## 5. Seeking for explanations of the shift in interpreting

As mentioned above, some may argue that this interpreter exceeds the responsibilities of an interpreter as he shifts the speaker's politeness strategy from independence to involvement and even introduces a new topic for both sides. Since the advance of the concept of translation, which was regarded as an activity of language transfer (Newmark, 1982), faithfulness has always been given priority. Terms such as loyalty, equivalence, and fidelity have long been used to underscore adherence to the source text, and any

departure from these principles may be seen as betrayal. In this case, interpreters may be swamped in a "faithful/betrayal dilemma" (Ricoeur, 2006). While this notion may hold merit when interpreting is solely focused on linguistic elements, it somewhat fails to acknowledge the broader contextual factors at play, such as history, ideology, and social background, which also shape the transfer of languages.

The 20th century saw a range of efforts to tackle the issue of the "faithful/betrayal dilemma" (Zhu, 2021, p. 51). These efforts are largely inspired by the "cultural turn" (Bassnett, 1998), where translation and interpreting are liberated from word-to-word or phrase-to-phrase equivalence. Instead, language transformation has begun to be explored and understood from a broader cultural perspective, signaling a departure from mechanical language-transfer activities toward ones influenced by cultural nuances. In this light, the actions of the interpreter might be considered not only understandable but also acceptable.

## 5.1. Interpreting in a broad sense

According to Wang (2007), translation can be categorized into two types: broad translation and strict translation. Broad translation allows translators to consider various aspects beyond mere linguistic equivalence; they may take into account cultural nuances, the intended impact on the reader, and the overall purpose of the text. In contrast, strict translation demands a high degree of fidelity to the source text, with accuracy and precision being paramount. For genres like laws or technology, strict translation tends to be favoured, whereas for literary works, a broad translation might often be employed.

These concepts can extend beyond written translation and might be equally applicable to interpreting. In broad interpreting, which may occur in contexts such as business meetings or sports events, interpreters have the flexibility to focus on the communicative intent and the relational dynamics between the speakers. They may employ different strategies to ensure that the tone, politeness, and interpersonal subtleties are effectively conveyed, even if this means moving away from a word-to-word rendering. In strict interpreting, such as in the United Nations or in courtrooms, the interpreters tend to adhere closely to the source language to ensure that diplomatic and legal precision is maintained. Every word may carry weight, and interpreters are expected to deliver an exact rendition without injecting their own interpretations or opinions (Inghilleri, 2003)

Evidently, in a business negotiation like the one mentioned above, different from rigorous scientific texts or other genres with certain requirements, there are no extremely strict requirements on the accuracy of the text, which indicates that the interpreter's subjectivity can be given a full play, and they enjoy more freedom as well as visibility during rendering. Therefore, in the sense of broad rendering, interpreters could resort to some approaches to maintain the face and ensure politeness with the parties involved.

## 5.2. Interpreting as a purpose-oriented communication

The purpose of communication is a fundamental factor that influences the methods or strategies employed in language transfer. In fact, translation activity, as Venuti (2018) observes, is not "an untroubled

communication of a foreign text, but an interpretation that is always limited by its address to specific audiences and by the cultural or institutional situations where the translated text is intended to circulate and function" (p. 14). According to Reiss et al. (2014, p. 94), "a translational action is determined by its *skopos*". "*Skopos*" is a Greek word that refers to purpose in English. On the basis of Skopos, one is inclined to translate in accordance with some principles in the target text system consciously (Vermeer & Chesterman, 2021).

In fact, the purposes discussed in translation studies can be naturally introduced into interpreting studies, as both of them serve as effective and essential tools in intercultural communication (Hlavac & Xu, 2020). In the realm of business interpreting, the interpreter's primary goal is to enable clear and effective communication between the parties involved, promoting the seamless flow of dialogue and negotiation. To fulfill this communicative purpose, interpreters may need to employ a range of techniques, such as modulating politeness strategies to align with the social dynamics of the interaction or introducing new topics to maintain engagement and clarity. Ultimately, they are not merely conduits of language but active participants in the communicative process, tasked with the responsibility of ensuring that the exchange is not only linguistically accurate but also culturally coherent and conducive to the goals of the meeting. By tailoring their strategies to the specific *Skopos* of the interpreting situation, they contribute significantly to the success of cross-language and cross-cultural business interactions.

## 6. Conclusion

This study used a Chinese-English business interpreting as a case to investigate the utilization of the involvement politeness strategy and independence politeness strategy and discuss whether the manipulation of these politeness strategies might be acceptable or not. The findings reveal that in this Chinese-English business interpreting, the interpreter tends to use the involvement politeness strategy in the rendering. Notably, the independence politeness strategy in the Chinese source text is shifted to the involvement politeness strategy in English renditions, which might be deemed acceptable given the interpreting type and rendering purpose. This study further strengthens the applicability of independence and involvement politeness strategies, which are primarily introduced in studies of a monolingual context. More importantly, it sheds new light on interpreting studies to fill the research vacancy. Arguably, in contrast with the achievements made concerning the application of politeness strategies in translation studies, the use of them in interpreting studies is not comparable.

Admittedly, two limitations are present in this study. To begin with, the duration of the business negotiation is relatively short, lasting only about one and a half hours. Consequently, the available research material may be somewhat limited in scope. In addition, this business negotiation is undertaken by a Chinese company and an English counterpart with English as the target language, and chances are that the representativeness is not that strong when the language pair in rendering is changed. What is more, business interpreting is only one type of community interpreting (Hale, 2007); therefore, further research is needed to validate the generalizability of our findings through other studies with the expansion of modes as well as mediums for interpreting (Gamal, 2023). Notwithstanding these limitations, the

present research represents a good attempt and serves as a valuable starting point for the exploration of politeness and its utilization in interpreting and intercultural communication studies.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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**About the author**

**Jiaqi Xue** is a PhD student at the Faculty of Humanity, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. His research interests include translation and interpreting studies and the English translation of Chinese classics.

# Yorùbá Theatre Practice and Nollywood

## Shola Balogun[1*]

University of Ibadan, Nigeria

https://doi.org/10.22034/MIC.2024.444139.1013

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## Abstract

The development of theatre in Yorùbáland evolving from travelling actors to the contemporaneous practice of the culture in the film medium is an intriguing phase of maturity of the Yorùbá people's theatrical tradition. Nollywood has made the whole world a stage for Yorùbá theatre. By extending the performance space beyond the physical confines of the auditorium, Nollywood represents both the current state and future direction of Yorùbá theatre. The demand for relevance and the focus on contemporary audience interests all play a significant part in the shift of Yorùbá theatre from stage to film medium. Nollywood has helped Yorùbá theatre practice by preserving Yorùbá stories, enhancing widespread acceptance and attracting global attention. Yorùbá theatre serves as an exposition of Yorùbá tradition and culture; thus, understanding the worldviews of its creators is essential for appreciating its current practice and the factors influencing its representation in Nollywood. This paper aims to highlight the importance of understanding the theatre developed in Yorùbáland and how its culture is depicted in the film adaptation of Akínwùmí Ìṣọ̀lá's Ṣaworoidẹ (Brass Bells).

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[1] https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1759-4090 | ✉ booksbysholabalogun@gmail.com

[*] Department of Theatre Arts, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

## 1. Introduction

Myth and ritual have been identified as having a significant influence on the earliest forms of theatre and dimensions of practice. The premise that theatre's beginnings are connected to myth and ritual remains a widely accepted theory (Brockett & Hildy, 2014; Yerimah, 2016). Some critics, like Michael J. Anderson (2005), make the observation that the increase in "adaptive mythmaking" which was best exemplified in ancient Greek culture by the recognition of the freedom to appropriate epic contents and creatively alter traditionally defined myths and sacred rituals as particularly evident in Athenian tragedy, provided the common ground to further describe the emergence of theatre and dimensions of theatre practices in many communities (Anderson, 2005). It has been noted by Ian C. Storey and Arlene Allan (2005) that myth and ritual had a significant influence also on the Ramlila play-cycles of northern India and offered precisely the same cultural treasures, much like they did on Greek theatrical practice. The atmosphere provided by myth and ritual allowed the theatre to evolve into a new way of expressing the identities of cultures in many parts of the world. However, theatre developments and practices differ, partially determined by the environment, adaptability, and worldviews, and partly dependent on the traditions of play-like actions and a sense of history.

The environment's "theatricality of the culture" is crucial to the development of theatre in ways that are appropriate for highly dramatic forms (Fabian, 2004). Storey and Allan (2005) emphasize that plays were performed in public in classical Athens, at a theatre close to an altar of a deity and as part of that deity's devotion, in broad daylight while audience members would be aware of their own duties. Iran's Shiite Muslims perform a related custom called 'Ta'ziyeh' (T'azieh), a passion drama centered on the tragedy of Hussain, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad. The Iranian indigenous ceremonial performances honoring Siavash and Mithra from the ninth century are claimed to be its earliest sources of history (Iran Press, 2024). According to Peter Chelkowski (n.d), the early ta'ziyeh dramas were presented at intersections and other public spaces where sizable crowds could congregate (paras. 1–5). The theatre as an art form is the culmination of many years of development and its practices are significantly informed by ethnic backgrounds and shared identities.

The capacity of any given community to adapt the materials of its culture to relatively new systems and embrace newer types of conventional adjustments to meet the needs of its audience is the right framework to reassess the future of arts and tradition in that community. How important theatre is to a community's residents will define their level of engagement in the art form and the functions that community will assign to theatre. The theatrical characteristics are determined by the experiences and surroundings in which theatre is brought to life because no two environments are the same and no fixed model exists of theatre or theatrical activity. The experiences and environments in which theatre comes to life dictate the theatrical dimensions. The Palestinian society in the occupied territories, which is influenced by Arab history, religious culture, and the arts, with the curfews and restraints imposed by the Israeli government, is an example of how the development of theatre and its various practices are shaped by specific situations and experiences. The need for Palestinians to express their struggles, what they encounter in their land

and their experiences outside of their territory, has been acknowledged as a key factor in the development of professional Palestinian theatre (Snir, 2005).

As exemplified in the Greek theatre and Iranian 'T'azieh', the sense of adaptability, using legends and myths has been most formative in the advancement of theatre practices. This tradition is also evident in the Jewish community in the present-day Israel and among the Yorùbá people in the southwest of modern-day Nigeria. René Bloch (2017) and Freddie Rokem (2001) have noted that Israeli theatre turned to the ancient Hebrew canonical texts for inspiration due to the lack of native theatre practices and classical records of theatrical traditions in its culture. This was done despite Orthodox Jewish beliefs against the performance of biblical passages on stage due to their sacred status, particularly because of theatre's underlying association with Dionysus cult in ancient Greece (Rokem, 2001; Bloch, 2017).

In the Yorùbá community, the Ọ̀yọ́ Yorùbá sacred Egúngún[1] cults, indigenous religious observances such as the worship of the òrìṣàs[2], and Ifá[3] divination recitals had a significant impact on the early development of Yorùbá theatre and practice (Adedeji, 1969; Yerimah, 2016; Babayemi, 1980). Yorùbá theatre is first and foremost a cultural spectacle. Ahmed Parker Yerimah (2016) rightly affirms that the richness of Yoruba culture, in contrast to other indigenous groups in Nigeria, is situated in the tradition that provided creative ways of keeping its community entertained. As written culture developed in the early 19th century, existing performance styles that stemmed from indigenous observances began taking on the form of conventional practices (Yerimah, 2016).

The more the actor training, staging principles, and professionalism differed from community to community, the more theatre developed through adaptation and synthesis between innovation and modification (Anderson, 2005). Anderson maintains that the essence of any art emerging from a certain culture or group is the presence of "an actiology" - a considerable analysis of the actions in a staged performance- as the foundation text for modern society (Anderson, 2005, p. 128). In other words, the influence a practice has on a current audience should be used to evaluate if that practice is still worthwhile in a given society. This emphasis on "actiology" considers the necessity to understand a cultural form and its continuous impact for later generations, particularly considering the global market context.

The mainstay of theatre as an art within a tradition is to methodically select historical or mythical resources from the past that uphold a constructive sense of self-identity and ethical principles. Therefore, to remain relevant, especially in a global context, artistic creations and conventions must be continually reformulated. Charles Binam Bikoi (2010, p. 8) makes the point against what he calls "archaeological approach to African culture" by suggesting that a tradition should not be static, rigid, and stale, but continuously recreated. In this sense, for artistic creations and conventions to maintain relevance, they must be continually reformulated to serve the objectives for which they were developed by the people who originally own the tradition (Binam Bikoi, 2010).

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[1]. Egúngún is the Yorùbá term for masquerade.
[2]. Òrìṣàs is a plural form of Òrìṣà, which means deities in Yorùbá traditional religion.
[3]. Yorùbá divination oracle.

Tradition is tied to an environment, to a culture of how various people create and recreate novel forms of expressing themselves, actively seeking out different answers to different problems, and adjusting to 'ideas and objects' from elsewhere (Falola, 2003, pp. 2-3). Tradition is a fundamental component of a people's identity. While some of the behaviors narrated in regional myths are deemed to have universal interpretations, some are construed as unique to a subset of people within the parameters of a particular social setting. According to Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2003), globalization should not be thought to be a means of Westernizing Non-Western traditions. In relation to artistic creations and conventions, globalization is not a post-colonial alternative to introducing Western values into other cultures and practices. It simply deals with the need to adjust art forms and practices to the modern public's interest, stripping them of materials that have become problem areas for the larger community for economic gains and intercultural dialogues. The film medium, a more recent creative form of art and a major worldwide industry, in the words of Richard Barsam and Dave Monahan (2010), now shapes how traditions and cultures are seen all over the world. Aesthetics, theatrical arts of non-European communities, social ideals, and indigenous characteristics are promoted through films, and the Yorùbá theatre has carved out its place as an intriguing cultural force.

## 2. Literature review

Simon Shepherd and Mick Wallis (2004, p. 43) define the concept of intertheatricality as an exposition of the relationships between theatrical texts, staging techniques, genres, conventions, memory, and a shared language of entertainment within a given theatrical tradition. Intertheatricality, a concept credited to Jacky Bratton (2003), posits that while each performance is a unique moment of clarity, all entertainment art forms, and aesthetics embedded in a certain culture of theatrical tradition are interdependent. The idea that all aspects of performance within a theatrical tradition are interconnected even when they seem separated is at the heart of intertheatricality. Yorùbá theatre, which first made its appearance in the early Seventeenth century when the Ọ̀yọ́ Mèsì[4] ruling council hired six men to dress up in masks modelled after the dreaded Egúngún Yorùbá cult of the ancestors to scare away delegations directed by the reigning monarch Aláàfin[5] Ògbólú, has benefitted considerably from its "distinctive Ọ̀yọ́ system" with its identifiable dominant culture of performance conventions. The masked men, who had been caught and discreetly entrusted into the hands of the King's Staff Bearer known as Ọlógbìn Ológbojò and his kinsman Èṣà Ọgbín, underwent formal training as comic actors in the palace, recreating the aborted Ọ̀yọ́ Mèsì scheme to amuse the King and officially licensed to put on public shows.

When the Egúngún ancestral cult governing body infiltrated the space as a business opportunity, it brought into the art form a wide variety of entertainment aesthetics and repertory, consisting of spectacular acrobatic dance in action, improvised playlets drawing from both the real and the make-believe worlds, satire, mime, chant, song, music and organization which were of its own making and contributions, and creative birth of a travelling theatre known as Aláárìnjó the masque-dramaturgs' tradition in Yorùbáland

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4. Traditional Yorùbá council of lawmakers
5. The kings of Ọ̀yọ́ are known as Aláàfin, which literally means "One who owns the palace".

(Adedeji, 1969). The organization and discipline of Aláárìnjó theatre practitioners contributed to its recognition as a viable-commercial theatre in its early days.

The later-emerging Yorùbá popular theatre, which flourished from the 1940s through to the early 1990s, was a creative synthesis of church-style dramas and significantly enhanced independent secular performance, with a focus on plays based on Yorùbá historical people, experience in urban culture, and peasant life. Yorùbá actors who were well-known for their work in popular theatre excelled as dancers, choreographers, drummers, and lyricists. For the most part, many of Yorùbá theatre's early theatrical films were shot on celluloid and screened in cinema theatres. Some of the well-known names most closely associated with Yorùbá popular theatre as practitioners on stage, radio, television, and film are Hubert Ògúndé, Dúró Ládiípò, Kólá Ògúnmólá, Moses Ọláìyá (Baba Sàlá), Oyin Adéjọbí, Jimoh Aliu, Ìṣọlá Ògúnsọlá, Akin Ògúngbè, and Moses Omilaní (Adedeji, 1969; Adelugba et al., 2004; Barber, 2004; Babayemi, 1980).

Yorùbá popular theatre's models of performance space and systems of drama presentation was professionally in constant transition from earlier adopted indigenous African concepts of performance space to 'old-fashioned Western dramatic form' (Barber, 2004). Despite being influenced by oral tradition, in which plays are first improvised before being written down, there is a well-supported argument that literacy in both English and Yorùbá helped the Yorùbá popular theatre connect to a variety of audience segments (Barber, 2004). The spontaneous responses of those in the audience are of utmost importance in the theatre, and they played an important role in how Yorùbá theatre companies consistently integrated new ideas- including a few repetitive humorous lines, moral dimensions, and conflicts- into the stage performances of their plays (Barber, 2004).

By creating story ideas, improvised dialogues, characterizations, and engaging acting that pulled in the audience, the Yorùbá theatre companies developed an innovative and experimental way of developing written texts for the staging of their plays. In practice, code language, music, song, and dance are all interconnected within the "theatricality of the culture" and continue to serve as a practical method by which some dramatic actions are given complementary meanings in the context of the genres with which they are associated. Plays such as *Yorùbá Ronú* (Yorùbás, Think) by Hubert Ògúndé, *Ọba Kòso* (The King Did Not Hang) by Dúró Ládiìpò, *Lànké Ọ̀mùtí* (Lànké The Drinkard), the stage adaptation of Amos Tutùọlá's novel The Palmwine Drinkard, by Kólá Ògúnmólá, and the soap opera *Gbádékọ* (Suspend the Crown) by Adé Ọlófin serve to demonstrate the astounding way in which all entertainment aesthetics within Yorùbá tradition are dramatically homogeneous while their appropriateness as distinct categories are also utilized to great effect.

According to Karin Barber's (2004) observations, Yorùbá theatre was primarily oral in both form and practice. This means that the plays were created through improvised, unscripted, and group production through the performers' collaborative interaction with audiences and each other. They also drew from repertoires of accumulated idioms and characterization strategies (Barber, 2004, p. 176). When performed, the majority of plays by Yorùbá popular theatre companies were not recorded as theatrical

scripts that could be published. The actor-practitioners relied on an experimental endeavor to produce model scripts that successfully portrayed a varied assortment of songs, hymns, invocations, melodic chants, and their own concepts of stage movements, genres, customs, and current events of the era (Barber, 2004, pp. 177-181). It might be argued that Yorùbá theatre companies gradually started to adopt published plays and novels in both English and Yorùbá as sources for their productions due to a combination of "survival instinct" and the need to appeal to elite audiences (Adedokun, 2009, pp. 30-31). Although it has been correctly stated by Joel A. Adedeji (1969, p. 375) that in the Aláárìnjó Theatre we have found the universal, and that its achievements are reflected in the form and style of the "new theatre", the significance of the Aláárìnjó Theatre era through the medium of Nollywood films today does not stem from a struggle for survival. Its theatrical practice has influenced how the Nigerian story is portrayed to international audiences.

## 3. Method

Yorùbá theatre has maintained a significant cultural position in post-independence Nigeria. Jeremiah Comey (2002, p. xi) maintains that great artists identify themselves through their work, and similarly, outstanding film actors communicate by their quality, which is a blend of talent and personality. This is relevant to the way Yorùbá theatre performers have defined themselves as exceptional artists through their ability as gifted actors, from the court of Aláàfin Ògbólú in the seventeenth century to the home video revolution in Nigeria today. Yorubá language film, with independent film producers and an extensive network of distributors, is one of the most widely recognized in the Nigerian video film industry. Nollywood, the brand name for the Nigerian film industry, is said to have been formed in 2002 by New York Times reporter Norimitsu Orishi to allude mostly to English-language films with production and distribution centers in Lagos, Onitsha, Asaba, Enugu, and Aba (Haynes, 2016). While Nollywood serves as the formation of credible film culture and a sense of internal self-improvement in Africa's most populous country, it is not a stereotype of the United States of America's Hollywood, one of the world's oldest film industries, or India's Bollywood, the world's largest film industry (Giwa, 2014).

Nollywood is deservedly considered as a particularly unifying cultural art form across Africa and in its diasporas (Krings & Okome, 2013). Nollywood has positioned Nigeria as a nation with a booming film industry. In Nollywood, Yorùbá theatre practice, with its indigenous origins of stories, particularly West African mysticism and spirituality, can be seen in theatrical films that are not sensationalized and made by the people themselves. Subtitling for Yorùbá language films has additionally helped to further broaden their appeal and their audiences far beyond the boundaries of their indigenous dialect. Yorùbá tradition, with its more robust mix of theatre, drama, and film history, has remained popular with Nollywood audiences, as evidenced by the production of Yorùbá-language film *Ṣaworoidẹ (Brass bells)* directed by Tunde Kelani. Written by Akínwùmí Oròjídé-Ìṣòlá, *Ṣaworoid*ẹ was first made into a film in 1999 before being published as a novel in 2008. The film opens on the traditional drum known as 'Dùndún' among the Yorùbá, and is referred to as the Ṣaworoidẹ, a sacred drum with the brass jingle bells that serves as the essential connecting thread between events in the film, reeling out the verses:

Aṣọ funfun níí sunkún aró,
Ìpìlẹ̀ ọ̀rọ̀ níí sunkún èkejì rẹ̀, tan tan tan!
B'ójú bá yẹjú, k'óhùn má yẹhùn...

It is the white fabric that indicates its need for dyeing;[6]
It is the initially spoken word that usually precedes
the next sentence.
Our pledges to one another shouldn't be broken
even when we are absent (Kelani, 1999).

The Ṣaworoidẹ verses are later picked and fully recited by Amawomárò the old Ifá priest and called the Ifá chants Òtúrá Méjì:

Aṣọ funfun níí sunkún aró,
Ìpìlẹ̀ ọ̀rọ̀ níí sunkún èkejì rẹ̀, tan tan tan!
A dífá f'Adérọ̀mókun,
Ọmọ Ọọ̀ni Àlànàkàn Èsùrú,

Níjọ́tí ńmẹ́kún ṣèráhùn ire gbogbo.
B'ọ́kan bá yọ nínú igbó, a b' ọ́nà wá.
Ire gbogbo, mà mà wá Jogbo wá ò,
Ire gbogbo,
Bá a bá dami órí,
A b'ẹ̀sẹ̀ wá, ire,
Ire gbogbo, mà mà wá Jogbo wá ò,
Ire (Kelani, 1999).

Ire gbogbo, mà mà wá Jogbo wá ò,
Ire gbogbo,
Bá a bá dami órí,
A b'ẹ̀sẹ̀ wá, ire,
Ire gbogbo, mà mà wá Jogbo wá ò,
Ire (Kelani, 1999).

It is the white fabric that indicates its need for dyeing;
It is the initially spoken word that usually precedes
the next sentence,
Are the priests who performed a divination for Adérọ̀mókun,
the son of Ọọ̀ni Àlànàkàn Èsùrú,
On the day he was complaining about his lack
of good fortune,
One comes out of the woods, the other comes
out of the paths.
Come and visit Jogbo, good fortune.

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[6]. The author of this paper provided the English translation here.

Good fortunes.
Water will trickle to the feet if it is poured on
the top of the head.
Come and visit Jogbo, good fortune.
Good fortunes.

The plot of *Ṣaworoidẹ* revolves around a conflict of interest between power and greed at Jogbo, an imaginary contemporary community in Yorùbáland whose current king Lápitẹ́, deciding to bypass the age-old traditions of his progenitors to exert his corrupt practice unchecked with the encouragement of some of the chiefs around him, sets out to wipe out whatever stands in his way. Lápitẹ́ refuses to complete the age-old rite of swearing an oath, having incisions made at the center of his head and applied with the powder that is kept in a small brass container being a symbiotic sacred relationship with the sacred drum's brass jingle bells and the ceremonial brass crown that is a taboo for any king to wear without submitting to the entire process as put in place by Ọdẹ́jídẹ́, the first king of Jogbo.

Lápitẹ́ becomes restless after being informed secretly of his impending death due to excruciating headache if he wears the ceremonial brass crown as culturally expected and the sacred drum is beaten to his hearing by the drummer Àyángalú. As a result, he sends hired murderers after Àyángalú, who flees in the middle of the night after being tipped off by Badà, taking the sacred drum and Adébọ́lá the son of Adébòmí, the deceased prince with him, branching at the house of his son Àyánníyì and informs him to flee with his wife as well. Àyángalú's house is ransacked, and a drum, presumed to be the one with sacred status, is carried to Lápitẹ́. A series of rebellions break out in Jogbo, organised by youth leaders and farmers, against the encroachment of the timber business on local farmlands, despite their requests to Lápitẹ́ to end the monopoly. Lápitẹ́ authorises the timber business management to sneak in weapons to combat the agitators and to obtain weapons for himself. Adébọ́lá, the son of Adébòmí, is warned by Àyángalú not to reveal his birth name to anyone in Jogbo and is sent with 'àrokò'- a symbol of code language to Amawomárò. Praying for protection on Adébọ́lá's journey, Àyàngalú makes use of incantation:

Àyúnlọ, àyúnbọ̀ l'ọwọ́ ńyẹ́nu,
Àtẹ̀pẹ́ l'ẹsẹ̀ ńtẹ̀nà.
Ẹrù kìí p'òsùká, ẹlẹ́rú l'ẹrù ńpa (Kelani, 1999).

The hands reach the mouth without boundaries.
For a very long time, the sole of the foot will tread the routes.
The burden will be carried by the carrier, not by
the piece of fabric that is put on the head to lighten the load.

Adébọ́lá introduces himself as "Arẹ́sẹ̀jábàtà" when he arrives in Jogbo and is asked his name by Amawomárò. Adébọ́lá is further cautioned by Amawomárò, who has recognized him, not to ever use his real name when speaking to people in Jogbo. Instead, he should claim to be a stranger who has come to the area to learn the Ifá divinatory system from Amawomárò. Amawomárò, casting Ifá to forecast what Adébọ́lá's arrival will bring forth, says:

"Ìrosùn Méjì"
Igún lá àlá, Igún j'orí,
Àkàlàmòngbò lá àlá, a sì j'ẹ̀dọ̀,
Adìẹ lá àlá, a t'ọwọ́ eni d'ọ́wọ́ ẹni,
A t'ọwọ́ ẹni d'ọ́wọ́ ẹni l'adìẹ fi d'ótù Ifẹ̀:
A díá fún Onílégogoro-Àgbàyè,
Èyítí Ifẹ̀ gbójúlé,
Wọ́n ní ó rúbọ nítorí ikú, ó ṣeé, ikú ò paá.
Ifá, mo gbọ́nkàn lé ọ, àgbàyè,
Onílégogoro, àgbàyè,
Ifá, mo gbọ́nkàn lé ọ, á-a-gbaye,
Onílégogoro, àgbàyè (Kelani, 1999).

The vulture dreamt and feeds on the skull,
The hornbill dreamt and eats the liver,
The fowl had a dream that it was going to travel from hand
to hand,
It was from hand to hand that the fowl arrived
in the old town of Ife,
Are the priests who performed a divination
for Onílégogoro-Àgbàyè
That Ifẹ̀ relied on.
They requested that he carry out a ritual to prevent death;
He did so, and his death was prevented.
Ifá, I place my faith in you; spare me from dying,
You whose dwelling is a towering building,
save me from dying.
Ifá, I place my faith in you; spare me from dying,
You whose dwelling is a towering building,
save me from dying.

Amawomárò recites "Èjì-Ogbè" while guiding Adébọ́lá in the Ifá divinatory recitations.

Èjìogbè, Èjèjì mogbè, n ò gb'ẹnìkanṣoṣo,
Adíá f'ójúoró ń rèé rè sàlẹ̀àbàtà,
Ńrèè kanrí ọmọ níbíbí,
Ẹ wolé ayò, ẹ w'ọmọ,
A kìí bálé ayò l'áìkún,
Ẹ wolé ayò, ẹ w'ọmọ (Kelani, 1999).

I do not take sides; I support the two sides evenly,
Is the priest who conducted a divination for the Seaweed
Shortly before she travelled far into the marshes
In order to produce a child of her own
At the time she was childless.
Take a look at the board game and the seeds,

> There are always seeds in the board game;
> Examine the board game and examine the seeds
> that it contains.

Amawomárò is secretly consulted by the youth leaders for a solution to stop Lápitẹ́'s onslaught, who is using the police to arrest and imprison their members, newsmen, farmers, and members of hunter groups. Amawomárò informs them of the solution and the consequences—the brass crown must not be removed from the palace for fifteen days. If it happens, because it is a taboo, Lápitẹ́ is expected to choose between exile and suicide. Aráparegángan, the daughter of Lápitẹ́, and Arẹ́sẹ̀jábàtà, also known as Adébọ́lá, meet at a dance competition and develop a friendly connection. Ọlọ́jọwọ̀n, a Jogbo logging company stakeholder, eventually finances and promises to provide firearms to the agitating youths to topple Lapite, but later backs out, leaving them in shambles. The youths attack and steal the royal brass crown off Lápitẹ́'s head during the dance competition's grand finale. Lapite is enraged when Amawomárò is brought in to offer a solution for recovering the stolen crown and he claims the only option is for Àyángalú, who is regrettably currently in exile, to beat the sacred drum. He calls Amawomárò a traitor and verbally abuses him. Làgbàyí, an official of the logging company, promises to help Lápitẹ́ find the stolen crown during his visit. Ọ̀pálábà, the elderly palace bard, starts singing while listening to the talk from the stairway:

> Alákìísà ńjó l'óru,
> B'ó pẹ́, ilẹ̀ á mọ́ l'ọla (Kelani, 1999).

> For the one who dances in rags at midnight,
> The day will soon break.

Ọ̀pálábà responds with proverbs when Séríkí validates what he has heard to him: "Olè l'òun ó ò bá ọ tún ìlẹ̀kùn ilé rẹ ṣe, o sì ńyọ̀, o ò sì fura?" (A burglar offers to help you fix your house's door and you start celebrating, shouldn't you exercise caution?) Ọ̀pálábà sings:

> Àṣá ńb'ẹ́yẹlẹ́ ṣ'eré, ẹyẹlé ńyọ̀... (Kelani, 1999).

> The pigeon delights in the hawk's playful interaction with it.

Ọ̀pálábà starts singing in response to Séríkí's comment about how hard it is for anyone to grasp what he is saying.

> Kò ì yé wọn, yóò yéwọn l'ọla (Kelani, 1999).

> It has not become plain to them, they will understand it
> better tomorrow.

Colonel Làgàta, the director of the logging company's security team, is brought to Lápitẹ́ as the person in charge of leading the military forces against the youths to recover the crown. The assembled crowd sings in celebration as Làgàta brings back the crown as he has earlier promised.

> Kùkùkẹkẹ wọn, ó ti tán o!
> Kùkùkẹkẹ wọn, ó ti tán o,
> Adéidẹ ti padà dé o,
> Kùkùkẹkẹ wọn, ó ti tán o! (Kelani, 1999).

> Their exhalations have all come to an end!
> Their exhalations have all come to an end,
> The brass crown is back home,
> Their exhalations have all come to an end!

Làgàta inquires of an officer who is a native of Jogbo about what may be done to solve the corruption in the community as he plans to usurp Lápitẹ́'s reign, and the latter responds:

> Òṣùpá lé, ẹni ò gún (Kelani, 1999).

> The moon sets, and you say that its luminescence is
> not in the proper place.

Làgàta firmly:

> Ohun ọwọ́ mi ò tó, mà fi gọ̀gọ̀ fàá!  (Kelani, 1999).

> I'll use a staff's hook to securely hold anything
> that is out of my grasp.

During the celebration of the return of the brass crown hosted by Lápitẹ́, Adébọ́lá, under the effect of alcohol, tells Arápáregángan that he is the son of Adébòmí who was murdered many years earlier. She receives word from him that his father, Adébòmí, is also deserving of the Jogbo crown. Excited, Arápáregángan slips to her mother, queen Tinúọlá, to ask her if anyone ever goes by the name of Adébòmí, while Lápitẹ́ is listening in on them. Balógun is called aside by Lápitẹ́ to be informed of the news, and he identifies Adébọ́lá as the one who will contend with him for the throne because of their own failures not to have also slain him. To Tinúọlá's dismay, Lápitẹ́ knows Arápáregángan to be a bastard whose pregnancy is brought to the palace, so he orders Balógun to find a means to kill Adébọ́lá right there. If that proves difficult since Adébọ́lá is with Arápáregángan, both should be slain. Arápáregángan is instructed by Tinúọlá to leave calmly with Adébọ́lá and flee. When Lápitẹ́ asks Làgàta if he wants in return for bringing back the brass crown, Làgàta stands up in the middle of the crowd and addresses the group, drawing attention to Lápitẹ́'s debauchery. Làgàta declares that Jogbo's throne has been annexed by the military, signaling that a permanent transformation has occurred. He tells Lápitẹ́ that the brass crown is what he needs in exchange and asks him to put it on his head. When Lápitẹ́ accuses him of being a traitor, Làgàta shoots him dead. Upon Lápitẹ́'s passing, the chiefs pledge allegiance to Làgàta, who is equally unscrupulous and vicious. He asks the chiefs for a list of individuals who could potentially cause issues for him. Balógun and Séríkí are addressed thereafter by Ọ̀pálábà as "Afọwọ́fọnná" (Those who stack burning coals on their palms).

> Afọwọ́fọnná a lè m'ọ́wọ́dúró?
> Afọwọ́fọnná è é m'ọ́wọ́dúró ò!  (Kelani, 1999).

> Can anyone hold their hands still
> while stacking burning coals on their palms?
> Anyone stacking burning coals on their palms
> cannot keep their hands still!

When they inquire about the significance of his ambiguous phrase, Ọ̀pálábà responds, "Ẹni tó sì bẹ̀rẹ̀ t'ó ń dẹ ihò òkété, kò mọ̀ pé Ọba Òkè ńdẹ tiẹ̀ náà l'éyìn" (The person who bends to dig the grasscutter's hole is unaware that the king of heaven is also digging up a hole from behind for him), and starts to sing: "Ọ̀jò tó rọ̀ tí ò dá, Ọlọ́run ló mọye ẹni tí yóó pa"  (Only God knows how many people will be soaked by the rain, which has not yet stopped) (Kelani, 1999). Amawomárò, along with a couple of the youth leaders, goes to Àyángalú to notify him of the terror that the reigning king Làgàta is inflicting upon the population. They inform him of their strategy, which entails inviting him to play the sacred drum next to Làgàta while he is donning the brass crown. The cliques that visit Làgàta perform songs to slight the reign of Lápitẹ́ the former ọba (king) to demonstrate the support the general public has for Làgàta.

> O j'ọba lọ, kìí ṣ'ẹgbẹ́ ọba,
> Ẹgbẹ́ Baba rẹ̀ níí ṣe!  (Kelani, 1999).

> He is more superior to the king. He is not on the
> same level with the king. He shares the same class
> as the king's father.

Yorùbá message transmission through drums features as an entertainment esthetic in the context of the film when Àyángalú utilizes the sound of the sacred drum to communicate with the spirit of Àyánníyì to encourage him to think about returning home, which happens toward the end of the film.

> Àyánníyì súré teteete wá!
> Ọjọ́ ojọ́kan, n'ilẹ̀ó jẹ ni.
> Ikán ní ó j'orí,
> Ìtalẹ̀ a j'ẹ̀dọ̀.
> Ìdí t'óbìnrin f'ìlẹ̀kẹ̀sí,
> Ilẹ̀ ni yóó fí jẹ.
> Káàsà, igí dá!  (Kelani, 1999).

> Àyánníyì turn up swiftly!
> One day, this earth will feed on a man.
> The head will ultimately be eaten by termites.
> Liver will be eaten by ants.
> The dirt will devour the waists that women
> adorn with beads.
> It's a pity, really!

Làgàta's secret state police is led to Àyángalú by Balógun. He is requested to bring the sacred drum to the palace. Àyángalú tells Balógun a lie, saying the drum is already burnt to ashes in an unintentional bush fire long ago. Adébọ́lá and Arápáregángan, who are nearby, run to Amawomárò to tell him that Àyángalú has been taken into custody. The long-forgotten Àyánníyì, the son of Àyángalú, enters as Amawomárò and the youth leaders who have come to see Amawomárò to carry out the plan of bringing Àyángalú to beat the sacred drum are at a loss for what else to do. When Àyánníyì introduces himself, Amawomárò asks him if he has the incision marks needed by custom to beat the sacred drum. To Amawomárò's delight, he replies in the positive. The drum is concealed in a large clay pot that is covered with a basket, and Adébọ́lá takes the party there. The brass bells chime as Àyánníyì pulls it out and rattles it. Badà introduces Àyánníyì as his younger brother who has a deeper grasp of the praise-names of Jogbo to the head of the invited drummers during the ceremonies of Làgàta's coronation, which would be commemorated by donning the brass crown, and requests that he join the group.

Làgàta brags as he reads his inauguration address, saying: *"My own time will be a little different because nobody else can do what we are unable to achieve. The nail cannot bend anything that is challenging for the teeth to cut. One only loves Ṣàngó by compulsion. One is compelled to love somebody who is stronger than they are. I am invulnerable. I'm trying not to terrify you. During this dispensation, those who are aware of their limitations will enjoy it. I am now and always will be one of you. Today, I, Lagata, will don the brass crown. The kingship lineages now include one additional member. The military is now a member of the households that don the Jogbo crown."* (Kelani, 1999) Séríkí is asked to come over and place the brass crown on Làgàta's head. To make the sacred verses audible, Àyánníyì steps out from the group of drummers and begins to beat the Ṣaworoidẹ in the direction of Lagata who, moaning in agony, collapses and dies, while the people in attendance run cover. Armed youths arrive on the scene to engage the soldiers, but they instead choose to show solidarity and leave without a fight. The ancient rituals are performed on Adébọ́lá as the new king of Jogbo. The film closes with Ọ̀pálábà's thought-provoking counsel and song:

> À t'ọmọdé tó ṣubú, tó lọ́ọ̀ wo wájú,
> À t'àgbà tó kọsẹ̀, tó w'ẹ̀yìn wò,
> Ẹ ò ha jẹ́ á jọ gbìnmọ̀ pọ̀, ká tún ojú ọ̀nà náà ṣe,
> K'ámá baà máa jọ ṣubú mọ́ (Kelani, 1999).

> Let the young men who stumble and look in the front,
> as well as the elderly who trip and look behind,
> come together to clear the way so that we will stop falling.

> Ọ̀rọ̀ l'ẹyẹ ńgbọ́ o,
> Ọ̀rọ̀ l'ẹyẹ ńgbọ́ o,
> Ẹyẹ ò déédéé bà l'órùlé o,
> Ọ̀rọ̀ l'ẹyẹ ńgbọ́ o (Kelani, 1999).

> Birds pay attention to the spoken word;
> they don't perch on rooftops arbitrarily.

Birds listen to words.

## 4. Results

Òrìṣà worship, Ifá divination rituals, and Ọ̀yọ́ Yorùbá sacred Egúngún cults all contributed to the creation and advancement of Yorùbá theatre and practice. Storylines from the religious tradition underwent change and performed as a component of communal observances until the theatrical experiences were structured as a profitable venture worthy of touring the Yorùbá nation. Yorùbá popular theatre practitioners who emerged later, such as Hubert Ògúndé, Moses Ọláìyá, and Oyin Adéjọbí, produced plays for stage, radio, and television, as well as films on celluloid that were shown in cinemas. Socially and culturally appropriate elements were employed in Yorubá theatre practice and film as a means of artistic communication. Characterisation, plotlines, dialogue, and play texts were all highly influenced by oral tradition and native African dramatic forms, which helped the Yorùbá theatre companies retain their audience (Merengwa, 2023).

In post-independence Nigeria, Yorùbá theatre has continued to hold a prominent standing both as a business and as a product of its culture. Yorùbá film has expanded significantly in the evolving world of entertainment, providing Nigerians cultural contents. Traditional Yorùbá filmmakers, like Mainframe Productions and Remdel Optimum Communications Limited, create theatre-related films that are designed to oppose social vices and advance the socio-cultural and political heritage of the Yorùbá people (Adekola et al., 2022; Imiti, 2022). The expressions employed in films such as *Ṣaworoidẹ* are reminiscent of the Yorùbá worldview. The instances of Lápitẹ́ and Làgàta draw attention to the oath-taking rituals involved in the installation of kings, the taboos associated with donning a crown without following ritual protocol, and the consequences of breaking these taboos. Incantation is a method commonly used to invoke mystical forces to establish or secure a purpose. The scenes where Àyàngalú is appealing for protection on Adébọ́lá's mission to Jogbo and where he beats the drum to summon his fleeing son, Àyánníyì, to return home are instances where incantation is most methodically employed.

*Ṣaworoidẹ* is influenced by Yorùbá indigenous cultural materials and paraphernalia of theatre traditions, as demonstrated in the story of the film. It is permeated with Yorùbá poetry, code language, symbolism, proverbs, songs and satires, and a wide range of mystical beliefs. It especially uses the drum as a means of information transmission. From the opening on the traditional drum with the brass jingle bells reeling out the tunes that are later orally picked up by Amawomárò the old Ifá priest to Ọ̀pálábà's lyrics and aphorisms, the film stylistically reflects the viability of Yorùbá brand of conventional practices and beliefs in the Ifá divination oracle, which offers advice through its stories, poetry, and inherent knowledge. (Ayinla & Ayodeji, 2022). Some techniques for disclosing hidden information to the audience among the Yorùbá include the use of the drum, lyrical verses of the Ifá divination oracle, songs, and coded language as dramatically presented in the film. In addition to using satires, for example, the elderly palace bard Ọ̀pálábà utilised songs and proverbs to make references to the idiosyncrasies of particular people and to offer commentary on the events that are transpiring in the story of the film.

*Ṣaworoidẹ* is a political film that is anchored in the context of intertheatricality within Yorùbá theatrical traditions, with proverbs, folklore, songs and dances, music, Ifá oracular divinatory chants, and the language of the drum all playing an important role in situating the narrative within the Yorùbá culture and indigenous theatre. What is happening in Nigeria, where political office holders refuse to abide by the country's laws and constitutions as laid down by the country's founding fathers and engage in all forms of treason, is well captured in how Lápitẹ́, upon becoming the new king of Jogbo with his chiefs, turns the community into a wasteland while stockpiling money in foreign banks. The way Làgàta is subtly recruited by Lápitẹ́ as a tool against his own people who are advocating for good governance is clear evidence of the characteristics of military invasions into politics in post-independence Nigeria. Yorùbá theatre practice in the Yorùbá theatrical film, *Ṣaworoidẹ* provides insight into the crucial roles of the drum as a medium to transmit messages in traditional Yorùbá communities, beliefs in divination and incantation, ritual and taboo scenarios, materials within the Yorùbá culture, and how kings were usually installed at a certain point in time in Yorùbáland.

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

Yorùbá theatre has completely embraced film medium to maintain its audience in the ever-evolving entertainment world. The Yorubá worldview and theatrical arts' influence on Nollywood films is the primary thrust of this paper. As we stressed previously, the performance forms created by various indigenous communities in the early days of theatre were frequently influenced by tribal festivals. Myths and rituals created a setting, and the versatility in employing ritual content for entertainment contributed to the formation of theatre and its various dimensions of practice in numerous cultures. The capacity of any given community to adapt its cultural materials to relatively new systems and embrace newer types of conventional adjustments is the right framework to reassess the future of arts and tradition in that community. Understanding the concept that explores the connection among theatrical texts, genre, stagecraft, entertainment language, and aesthetics within a theatrical tradition provides a stimulating understanding of theatre practices. We argued that Yorubá theatre and films use socially and culturally relevant materials as a form of expression and aesthetics. In the age of globalization, the budding film industry has gradually removed barriers to the transmission of cultures and customs.

Through using culturally significant items as components of entertainment, Yorùbá theatre continues to draw substantial audiences even outside its communities. Largely thanks to Nollywood, Yorùbá theatre has a global audience today. In the film *Ṣaworoidẹ*, Yoruba theatrical culture is evident. The strong prevalence of Yorùbá identity in *Ṣaworoidẹ* is within the frameworks of Yoruba lores, values, dance, music, recitations of songs, and usage of imageries as functional texts. The demographics for Yorùbá theatre and accompanying spectacles are growing because of increased exposure through the film medium. Many Yorùbá published novels and plays for the stage have been adapted for the film medium. In addition to its large viewership, Nollywood is currently repositioning Yorùbá theatre practice as a valuable expression of culture. The interest that modern audiences have in indigenous customs and cultures is a testament to the enduring appeal of Yorùbá theatre practice in Nollywood.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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## About the author

**Shola Balogun** is a Nigerian poet, writer, playwright, and filmmaker. He is currently a postgraduate student at the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. His research interests include theatre Aesthetics, tragedy in African theatre, and performing culture.

# Cultural Dimensions of Stroking Behavior: A Comparative Analysis of Persian and English Communication in Media Contexts

**Zahra Ghadamyari[1]**

Bahar Institute of Higher Education, Iran

**Haniyeh Jajarmi[2*]**

Bahar Institute of Higher Education, Iran

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### Abstract

In the realm of intercultural communication, effective interaction surpasses mere language proficiency and an understanding of the culture of a society is equally vital. Aiming to unravel the cultural perspectives of two distinct societies, this research examined the cultuling of stroking behavior in Persian and English languages steered by the conceptual model of Cultuling Analysis (CLA). To this end, 30 randomly selected Persian and English movies from various genres spanning the past decade served as the medium for data collection. A total of 306 speech segments embracing the cultuling of stroking behavior were extracted to the saturation level and examined based on the CLA model. The findings shed light on diverse hidden cultural patterns of Persian speakers in contrast to those of the English speakers encompassing collectivism, indirectness, power distance, high context, low trust, and high waitance. Finally, the factors contributing to these differences are discussed and the implications of the study and suggestions for further research are presented.

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[1] iD https://orcid.org/0009-0004-9157-9974 | ✉ ghadamyari1993@gmail.com
[2] iD https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1487-9047 | ✉ hjajarmi@baharihe.ac.ir

[*] Bahar Institute of Higher Education, Iran

# 1. Introduction

Language is a fundamental aspect of human behavior, serving as the primary means of communication between individuals. Speakers employ language to articulate their thoughts, emotions, intentions, and desires (Pishghadam & Ebrahimi, 2020). In the context of interpersonal communication, Transactional Analysis (TA) posits that individuals communicate from a state of ego, with communication transactions consisting of stimuli (e.g., "good morning") and responses (e.g., "good morning") that can be analyzed as discrete units. As proposed by Berne (1958, 1988), the TA approach comprises six core components, namely ego states, life positions, life scenarios, transactions, time structure, and stroke. Stroke, as a component of TA, refers to an indicator of the perception of the existence and value of others (Shirai, 2006). Stroking behaviors are categorized into verbal (expressed through using words), nonverbal (expressed through gestures and facial expressions), positive (expressed via positive and pleasant expressions), negative (expressed via negative and unpleasant expressions), conditional (using expressions related to the actions individuals do), and unconditional (using expressions related to the inherent qualities of individuals; Pishghadam et al., 2021a; Stewart & Joines, 1987). In intercultural communication, individuals manifest different stroking behaviors; depending on their cultural backgrounds. This variation can lead to ineffective communication. Hence, there is an urgent need for creating initiatives that foster intercultural encounters (Hmala, 2023).

On the other hand, language learning serves as an effective means of gaining insight into one's community, as well as that of others, thereby fostering self-awareness and enhanced understanding of oneself and others (Saadatnejad & Farsian, 2020). In this regard, the concept of "cululing," which refers to the combination of language and culture, was introduced by Pishghadam (2013) as a means of conceptualizing the interdependence of these two domains. As Pishghadam (2013) notes, the concept of cululing involves the expression of a society's customs and behaviors. In other words, the use of different terms and language patterns to articulate thoughts and ideas is influenced by a variety of scenarios and cultural factors.

Recently, a growing number of studies (e.g., Ebrahimi & Jahani, 2023; Jajarmi, 2023; Maghsoudi, 2021; Pishghadam et al., 2020a; Pishghadam et al., 2020b; Pishghadam et al., 2021b; Sheikhhosseini & Jafarzadeh, 2023) have focused on the study of various cululings; seeking to identify distinct behavioral patterns manifested in communicative exchanges and address harmful genetic traits and undesirable behaviors. These studies have examined various cululings, including the cululing of "Qesmat" in Iranian culture and language (Pishghadam & Attaran, 2016), the cululing of labeling in educational settings (Pishghadam & Ebrahimi, 2020), the cululing of death-oriented terms in the Persian language (Pishghadam et al., 2020a), and the cululing of teacher concern among language institutes' EFL teachers (Jajarmi, 2023). However, the cululing of stroking behavior, which is a prevalent communicative feature embedded within the cultural nuances of any society, has yet to be thoroughly investigated.

The present study aimed to investigate the cululing of stroking behavior; using the conceptual model of Cululing Analysis (CLA; Pishghadam et al., 2020b). This model comprises three primary components,

namely as Hymes' SPEAKING model, cultural models, and Pishghadam's emotioncy model. To achieve this objective, the study analyzed sentences that incorporated the cultuling of stroking behavior in English and Persian movies and series, which serve as excellent examples for appreciating the culture of a people or nation. This study selected movies, as the medium of art, because they depict the natural texture and realistic representation of everyday life. The language of art, in this case, reflects the authentic actions and emotions of the people in that society. Previous research has demonstrated that the media, especially movies, represent the society's behaviors, ideologies, and emotions (e.g., Dahl, 2004; Mininni, 2007; Mohamadi Mehr & Bicharanlou, 2014; Oladoja & Tomere, 2022). Specifically, for the purpose of this study, the following research questions were posed:

RQ1. What are the aims of employing stroking behavior in the Persian and English languages?

RQ2. In what specific situations stroking behavior is the most prevalent during communication in the Persian and English languages?

RQ3. How Persian and English speakers are related in terms of their use of stroking behavior in language?

RQ4. What are the discourse strategies employed in the use of stroking behavior in Persian and English language conversations?

RQ5. In what genres is stroking behavior utilized in the Persian and English languages?

RQ6. What emotional states do Persian and English language speakers experience while engaging or responding to stroking behavior?

RQ7. What are the cultural models that underlie the use of stroking behavior in the Persian and English languages?

Note that research questions 1 to 5 refer to Hymes' SPEAKING model, research question 6 is related to the emotioncy model, and research question 7 refers to the cultural models. The findings of the study provide insights into the communication abilities of English as a foreign language (EFL) learners.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1. Cultuling

Nunan (1999) sees culture as the implicit and virtual norms and rules that govern individual behavior and interactions between people. Therefore, different groups have different cultures that manifest themselves in the use of language. Moreover, cultural categories are not only associated with language but are also considered part of people's identities in society (Sapir & Whorf, 1956). Similarly, cultulings refer to the structures and expressions of language that reflect the social fabric of a given society and encompass the

reciprocal relationship between language and culture. In essence, language serves as a means of expressing the cultural values and beliefs of a given society (Pishghadam, 2013). As such, cultulings represent a powerful source of information about the culture of any given society, allowing for a deeper understanding of its values and beliefs through a linguistic lens (Pishghadam & Ebrahimi, 2020).

Through cululing analysis, our understanding of inappropriate cultural behavior can be enhanced, allowing for the development of strategies to fix and eliminate negative practices while fostering healthy cultural exchange within society. Ultimately, this can lead to the development of a more symbiotic relationship between individuals and their cultural environment (Pishghadam et al., 2020c).

## 2.2. The Conceptual Model of Cultuling Analysis (CLA)

The Conceptual Model of CLA (Figure 1) was first introduced by Pishghadam et al. (2020b) as a linguistic representation of the social interaction that embodies culture and are passed down from generation to generation. CLA represents an analytical approach to comprehensively understanding the patterns embedded behind language, and its unit of analysis can range from a word or a phrase to a sentence in different contexts. It includes the cultural information conveyed through the interactive relationship between cultuling and its background of occurrence (Pishghadam et al., 2020d). CLA aims to identify the cultural memes communicated through language in various forms such as conversations, stories, poems, and proverbs to make people aware of the defective genes (Pishghadam & Ebrahimi, 2020). If necessary, CLA makes suggestions to change those genes, which could pave the way for language to deal with human behavior (Cooper, 1989; Pishghadam & Ebrahimi, 2020). Hymes' SPEAKING model, cultural models, and Pishghadam's emotioncy model are the three core constituents of this model which are explained below.

**Figure 1.** The Conceptual Model of Cultuling Analysis (Pishghadam et al., 2020b, p. 30)
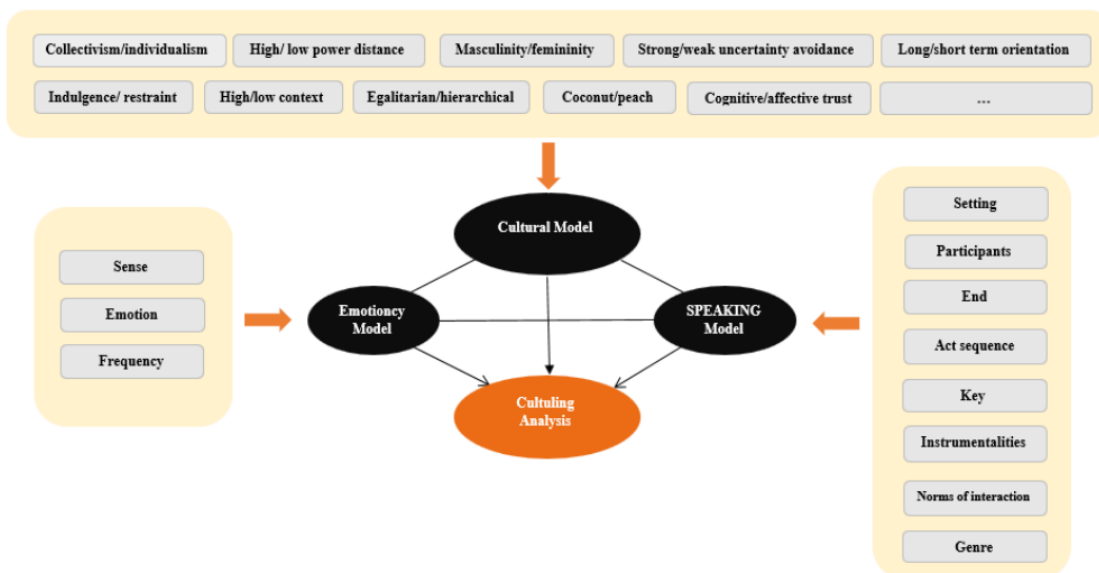
## 2.2.1. Hymes' SPEAKING Model

One of the most prominent sociolinguistic models that considers language in social context is the SPEAKING model of Hymes (1967). Hymes (1972) classified the group of factors under the heading SPEAKING into eight subcategories based on the importance of verbal communication and social interaction. Each of these subcategories influences how people interact and the nature of the communication and discourse to be interpreted (Pishghadam & Ebrahimi, 2020). The eight subcategories are as follows:

• Setting or Scene (S): According to Hymes (2003), the environment for speech events includes "time" and "place." Discourse settings can be categorized into groups, including public (street), formal (office), private (home), and informal (friendly parties; Pishghadam & Vahidnia, 2016).

• Participants (P): The personality of the members in discourse occasions can be assessed based on their age, sex, social status, and interpersonal connections. The relationship of the members of a discourse occasion can be classified into four categories: (a) equal and formal, (b) unequal and formal, (c) equal and intimate, and (d) unequal and intimate (Pishghadam et al., 2020a).

• End (E): In addition to the participants' points in a discussion, each discourse occasion has certain social aims that can be apparent or hidden. These aims are complex and dynamic and can change in different circumstances (Fasold, 1990).

• Act sequence (A): The act sequence shows the arrangement of interaction which includes both content and form. Drawing on the act sequence maxim, the members of a discourse occasion clear the way for the communication act during which the act shows up to play a vital part within the sequence (Sarfo, 2011).

• Key (K): This component is utilized to distinguish the tone in which an act is performed. The key can be friendly, discouraging, fastidious, genuine, kind, inviting, mocking, undermining, forceful, etc. (Wardhaugh, 2010).

• Instrumentalities (I): This component alludes to the sort of language form that a speaker utilizes to communicate and pass on his/her message. It can be verbal, nonverbal, written, and semaphore (Mehrabi & Mahmoodi Bakhtiari, 2021).

• Norms of interaction and interpretation (N): This component portrays the characteristics of a talk. It includes the rules of socio-cultural standards in person and interpersonal intelligence (Hymes, 1967).

• Genre (G): Genres refer to different kinds of speech acts and speech events, such as poetry, proverbs, riddles, conversation, prayer, lecture, and imprecation (Pishghadam & Ebrahimi, 2020).

## 2.2.2. Cultural Models

As individuals mature, so do the cultural patterns to which they are exposed, resulting in diverse cultural manifestations that are contingent upon the cultural patterns of their society. In this regard, culture can be construed as "wealth" in that it refers to a pattern of thought, feeling, and behavior that is acquired within a cultural community and is imbued with significance for a particular group of people (Markus & Hamedani, 2007). However, it is important to note that society is not a static entity, but rather a dynamic and evolving construct, with changes driven by the interplay of cultural values and their interrelationships with individuals, other groups, and societies (Pishghadam & Ebrahimi, 2020). Cultural models are therefore a striking example of group organization (Maltseva, 2017). Accordingly, cultural differences between different societies can be clearly explained. Many taxonomies of these cultural models have been proposed by various researchers such as Hofstede (2001) whose cultural model encompasses the six dimensions of individualism/collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, indulgence/restraint, long-term orientation/short-term orientation, and masculinity/femininity. Other such cultural dichotomies are high-context/low-context (Hall, 1976), high-trust/low-trust (Fukuyama, 1995), overstating/understating (Meyer, 2014), and high-waitance/low-waitance (Pishghadam, 2024) cultures.

## 2.2.3. Pishghadam's Emotioncy Model

Pishghadam et al. (2020b) acknowledged the significance of emotions, senses, and exposure levels in analyzing the cultulings of a society. To them, the integration of the SPEAKING model and emotioncy model (Figure 2) paves the way for a more accurate and comprehensive analysis of cultures. Pishghadam (2015) proposed emotioncy as a combination of emotion and frequency and suggested that people have varying degrees of emotions towards different elements in a language. He proposed a hierarchical model for various emotioncy states. As depicted in Figure 2, emotioncy levels can be classified into six types, ranging from Null to Arch. In the "Null emotioncy stage," an individual has no emotions towards a concept. In fact, in this stage, an individual has not heard, seen, or experienced the concept. In the "Auditory emotioncy stage," a person has only heard about a word or concept. The "Visual emotioncy level" involves the experience of hearing and seeing things. The "Kinesthetic emotioncy" stage occurs when people have heard, seen, and touched a real object. The "Inner emotioncy" stage happens when people have directly experienced the word or concept. Finally, the "Arch emotioncy," in which people are deeply involved in the learning process, occurs when they have conducted inquiries to obtain additional information (Pishghadam et al., 2016). Pishghadam et al. (2019) later added the Mastery level to the model in which individuals experience proximal emotions toward something and therefore can produce it. Further, the four kinds of emotioncy are Avolvement (Null emotioncy), Exvolvement (Auditory, Visual, and Kinesthetic emotioncies), Involvement (Inner & Arch emotioncies), and Metavolvement (Mastery emotioncy; Pishghadam, 2015; Pishghadam et al., 2016, 2019).

**Figure 2.** Pishghadam's Emotioncy Model: Emotioncy Levels (Pishghadam et al., 2019, p. 219)
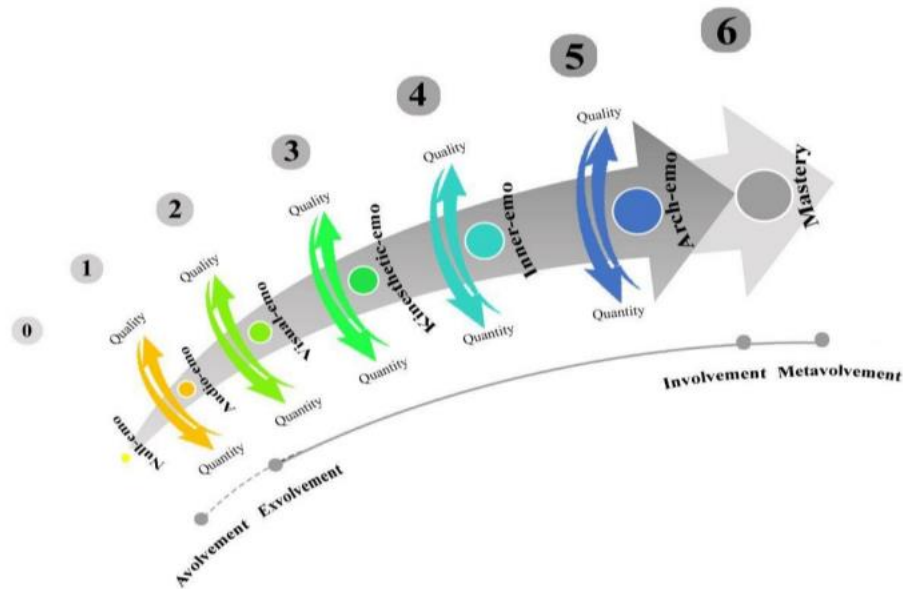


## 3. Method

### 3.1. Materials

Given that media, specifically movies, serve as concrete representations of the cultural norms and attitudes prevalent in societies (Mohamadi Mehr & Bicharanlou, 2014), this study collected and analyzed a corpus of phrases and sentences containing instances of stroking behavior from 30 movies (15 Persian & 15 English). They were randomly selected from various genres, including romance, family, and historical. The movies were produced between 2013 and 2023.

### 3.2. Participants

The study utilized a sample of characters from a diverse range of movies. They included both male and female participants spanning various age groups, educational backgrounds, and vocational experiences. Speech fragments containing instances of stroking behavior were extracted and subjected to rigorous analysis.

### 3.3. Procedure

This study was a qualitative investigation that employed content analysis of phrases and sentences extracted from the conversations of 30 movies in Persian and English languages. Data collection continued to the saturation level. All the conversations embracing the cultuling of stroking behavior were recorded (N=306) and then transcribed in both Persian and English (174 Persian & 132 English). Then, they were analyzed; using the conceptual model of CLA (Pishghadam et al., 2020b). The focus of the

analysis was on the linguistic and cultural aspects of the utterances performed by the movie characters concerning the use of stroking behavior. More specifically, verbal (positive/negative & conditional/unconditional) stroking behaviors were mainly taken into consideration in this study.

## 4. Results

This section presents a contrastive analysis of stroking behavior in Persian and English based on the conceptual model of CLA. Accordingly, Hymes' SPEAKING model was employed to depict the ethnography of communication pertaining to this cultuling. Furthermore, the emotioncy model and the cultural models were applied to examine the emotional and cultural aspects of stroking behavior in both languages.

### 4.1. Examining the Cultuling of Stroking Behavior Based on Hymes' SPEAKING Model

*Setting.* The findings indicated that in the Persian culture, stroking behavior is used mainly in informal and private situations while in English it is practiced in formal/informal as well as public/private situations, depending on the degree of formality, intimacy, and power relations among the participants. The examples for each situation are presented below. It should be noted that in the Persian language examples, (P) represents the phonetic transcription of the sentences and (E) stands for their English translation. Moreover, some examples of different situations may overlap.

A Persian example (1) representing stroking behavior in informal/private situations is as follows:

(1) /Zæn: mɑːʃiːn jɛːk ˈboʊiː ˈmiːdɛh/ (P)

   Woman: The car has a kind of smell. (E)

   /Mærd: toʊ ˈmɑːʃin ˈfæːɣæt ˈboʊjɛ ˈɑːtre toʊ miˈjæd, tʃe ætriːjæm ˈzɑːdiː/ (P)

   Man: Only the smell of your perfume has wafted in the car. Such a nice aroma! (E)

English examples representing stroking behavior in informal/private (2), formal/public (3), and informal/public (4) situations are as follows:

(2) (At home) Woman: I'm always gonna love you.

   Man: I'm always gonna love you, too.

(3) (At work) Boss: How do I look?

   Woman: You look magnificent.

(4) (In a coffee shop) Husband: Lovely as ever.

Wife: Thank you, Arthur. You're looking very good yourself.

*Participants.* The findings revealed that in Persian, the interlocutors related to each other on equal/formal (5), equal/intimate (1), unequal/formal (6), and unequal/intimate (7) occasions.

(5) /Mærd: æz ˈækshɑːt ˈkheɪliː bɛhˈtæriː/ (P)

   Man: You look much better than your pictures. (E)

   /Zæn: mɛrˈsiː. ˈvæliː toʊ bɛ hæˈmuːn dɑːɣuːniː ɪː/ (P)

   Woman (an online friend): Thank you, but you are just the same mess. (E)

(6) /Mærd: mæn hæˈmiːn æˈvælɛʃ æzætun ozrxɑːˈhiː mikɒːnæm ke ˈindʒɒː dævæˈtɛtun kærdæm. ʃomɑː koˈdʒɒː væ hæmˈtʃiːn biːɣuːleji: koˈdʒɒː. bɛfærˈmɑːjid. bɛfærˈmɑːjid/ (P)

   Man: I apologize for inviting you here in the first place. You are so out of place! I am using this place as a storage unit. Please, come in, come in. (E)

   /Zæn: næ. khɑːheʃ mɪˈkonæm/ (P)

   Woman: Don't mention it. (E)

(7) The mother, after seeing her children ready to go to the wedding ceremony:

   /mɑːˈʃɑːlə hɛˈzɑːr mɑːˈʃɑːlə/ (P)

   Mashallah, a thousand mashallahs. (E)

Similarly, in English, they had equal/formal (8), equal/intimate (4), unequal/formal (3), and unequal/intimate (10) relationships.

(8) Friend 1: I've always admired you. You're always so calm...

   Friend 2: Thank you.

(9) Waiter: Who is this lovely lady?

   Woman: This is Aurora.

   Waiter: Aurora, pleasure.

*End.* Inspecting the instances of stroking behavior, the study identified the most frequent purposes of Persian speakers for employing this cultuling as follows:

- Expressing dissatisfaction:

(10) /Zæn: hɑːˈlɑː be ˈʒɑːje mæn æz kolˈfæt dæfɑːʔ miːˈkoni:/ (P)

Wife: Now you're defending the servant instead of me? (E)

/ˈʃoʊhɑr: hæˈlɑː ˈdiːdiː ʃɑːzˈde xɑːˈnom bɑː æsˈloʊ ˈnæsæb | ˈprænsɛse mesgæˈrɑbɑːd | bɑːz hæm hɛˈmɑːqæt oʊ ʃelækhtɛˈgiːjeɪ xɔˈdɛt roʊ benˈdɑːz gæɪˈdæne ˈdiːgærɑːn/ (P)

Husband: You see, the noble and prestigious princess! The princess of Mesgarabad! Once again, throw your foolishness and carelessness onto others. (E)

- Expressing love:

(11) /Mærd:ˈxeɪli ˈdʊstɛt ˈdɑːræm/ (P)

Man: I love you so much. (E)

- Flattering:

(12) /Zæn: mæn hæˈnuːz pæræsˈtɑːɾ rɑˈmɑː hæˈstæm. pæræsˈtɑːɾˌe toː beʃˈæm beˈhtæɾ æz ˈin miːˈʃæm/ (P)

Woman: I am still Ramah's nurse. If I become your nurse, I will be better than this. (E)

/Mærd: beˈhtæɾ æz ˈin/ (P)

Man: Better than this? (E)

- Expressing resentment:

(13) /ˈʃoʊhar: mærˈdʒɑːn ˈguːʃ kʊn tʃiː dɑːˈræm beˈhet miːgæm/ (P)

Husband: Marjan, listen what I'm saying to you. (E)

/Zæn: to tʃeɾɑː inɢædɾ ɑːdæme bædbæxˈtiː hæsˈtiː? mæˈge to moɾd niːˈsti? … hɑːˈlem æzˈet beˈhæm miːxuːɾe, æzˈet motenæfeɾæm/ (P)

Wife: Why are you so unlucky? Aren't you a man? … Your presence bothers me; I hate you. (E)

- Criticizing:

(14) /Zæn: toː æˈge mæɾd buːˈdiː ɾæfiːɢˈhɑːtoː loʊ nemidɑːˈdiː/ (P)

Wife: If you were a man, you wouldn't ignore your friends. (E)

- Appreciation:

(15) /Zæn: mɛɾˈsiː kɛ ˈhæstiː/ (P)

  Woman: Thanks for your presence. (E)

The results of inspecting the instances of stroking behavior in the English language revealed the most frequent purposes of English speakers for employing this cultuling as follows:

- Affirmation:

(16) Woman: How do I look?

  Children: Like a princess.

- Expressing anger:

(17) Man: You are a liar a dirty liar.

  Woman: Just look, I loathe you.

- Expressing disapproval:

(18) Mother (to her daughter): You're a lunatic.

(19) Man (to his friend): You have a big mouth.

- Expressing affection and love:

(20) Man (said to his daughter): You are my one and only.

(21) Woman: I love you. Every time, every time I'm with you, my heart still keeps beating.

- Appreciation:

(22) Man: Thanks for helping me, still hearty….

- Expressing disagreement:

(23) Woman: I want to fix this.

  Man: You cannot fix it.

  Woman: You are not letting me.

  Man: Too late, Zoey.

- Expressing remorse:

(24) Woman: I know, and I am sorry.

Man: Don't be. Please do not be. I am actually honestly not even mad at you. I am mad at myself but ….

***Act sequence.*** The findings showed that the act sequence in the case of stroking behavior typically involves these steps in both languages: a) Opening, in which the initiator starts the speech act by, for example, a compliment (a type of positive stroke). b) Content, in which the speech act involves the specific attributes or actions that are being admired. c) Response, in which the recipient responds to the stroke by expressing gratitude, accepting the compliment, or reciprocating with positive remarks. d) Closing, in which the speech act concludes with a closing remark or transition to another topic.

However, variations in cultural norms and social conventions often influence the act sequence in stroking behavior. For example, cultural expectations regarding gender roles differ between Persian and English cultures which leads to variations in how different types of strokes are delivered and received.

***Key.*** The findings showed the most frequent tones used by Persian speakers when giving different types of strokes to others as complimentary (1), teasing (5), affectionate (11), admiring (25), and disappointed (13). The most frequent tones utilized by English speakers were supportive (2), accusatory (17), passionate (21), apologetic (24), and appreciative (22).

(25) Sister (to her brothers): /elaːhi doɾeːton begaɾˈdæm ke iŋɣæːdæɾ ɢæʃæŋˈgin/ (P)

God, I wish I could see you so beautifully. (E)

***Instrumentalities.*** As already mentioned, the instrument includes modes of expression, which are divided into two categories, namely written and spoken. The analysis of the movies showed that in both cultures, individuals give stroke by using nonverbal cues (e.g., smiling, eye contact, touch, and nodding) as well as linguistic expressions. However, the specific nonverbal cues used to give strokes, such as facial expressions, hand gestures, or physical proximity vary between Persian and English cultures. Written forms of giving a stroke, like writing a love letter to the beloved, are also common in both languages.

***Norm.*** The results demonstrated that there are notable cultural differences between English and Persian speakers in the specific language employed to give stroke to others. For example, Persian culture often uses indirect communication strategies, that is, they use expressions that imply praise rather than stating it directly (see (1), for example). Moreover, Persian culture often emphasizes collective harmony; therefore, some stroking behaviors (e.g., compliments and admiration towards others) occur more within social interactions, where they are seen as a way to foster positive relationships and maintain social cohesion. On the other hand, while in the English culture, stroking behavior occurs in both formal and informal settings, it is more common in informal interactions, such as among friends, family members, or colleagues. This indicates their inclination towards valuing individualism.

*Genre.* Showing stroking behavior is not limited to conversations; it also is used in other forms in both languages. However, the findings showed that the use of proverbs, poetry, and metaphorical language is more prevalent in Persian.

## 4.2. Examining the Cultuling of Stroking Behavior Based on the Cultural Models

The investigation of the hidden cultural patterns in the speech fragments used in the daily conversations of English and Persian speakers to examine their stroking behavior in the current research indicated the dominant cultural patterns as follows:

*Collectivism vs. individualism.* In the collectivist Persian culture, stroking behaviors are often group-oriented, reinforcing social bonds. For example, acknowledgments are less about individual achievements and more about contributions to the group's well-being. In contrast, the individualistic English culture uses stroking behaviors to affirm personal accomplishments, with praise often directed at one's capabilities.

*High-context vs. low-context.* Persian culture has a high-context nature, that is, the meaning of stroking behaviors is derived from context and non-verbal cues. For example, compliments may be implied rather than explicitly stated. Conversely, English culture, being low-context, tends to use stroking behaviors that are direct and clear, with explicit verbal affirmations that leave little room for interpretation.

*Low-trust vs. high-trust.* In the lower-trust environment of Persian culture, stroking behaviors serve as a means to build and maintain trust within close-knit circles. They are essential in fostering relationships and signaling trustworthiness. In the higher-trust English culture, stroking behaviors are more casual and frequent, reflecting an inherent trust in social interactions.

*Overstating vs. understating.* Persian culture's tendency to overstate can be seen in the exaggerated and indirect nature of the expressions that people use for giving strokes. On the other hand, English culture's preference for understatement is evident in their stroking behaviors which are often honest and direct.

*High power distance vs. low power distance.* In Persian culture, high power distance is discernable in stroking behaviors which are often used to show respect and deference to authority figures. In English culture, with its low power distance, stroking behaviors are more egalitarian, with superiors and subordinates more likely to exchange mutual affirmations.

*High-waitance vs. low-waitance.* The concept of 'waitance' influences stroking behaviors in terms of patience and timing. Persian culture exhibits high waitance in which stroking behaviors are more deliberate and timed to coincide with significant moments. In English culture, with low waitance propensity, stroking behaviors are more immediate and spontaneous.

### 4.3. Examining the Cultuling of Stroking Behavior based on Pishghadam's Emotioncy Model

In the exploration of stroking behavior within the framework of the emotioncy model, it is posited that individuals' perception of words linked to the cultuling of stroking behavior can evoke a spectrum of emotions. These emotions significantly influence their emo-sensory experiences, which may be limited to auditory and visual stimuli, a phenomenon termed 'exvolvement.' Conversely, when individuals are deeply moved, the experience permeates to the inner stage of 'involvement'. In the context of English culture, the directness of the cultuling facilitates the immediate achievement of the intended emotional impact.

In contrast, Persian culture exhibits a nuanced approach to the cultuling of stroking behavior. The Persian language is rich in indirect expressions, often conveyed through intricate linguistic constructs. This indirectness is a cultural marker that reflects a high regard for interpersonal harmony. The use of metaphorical language, poetry, and proverbs is prevalent, serving not only as a means of communication but also as a cultural embodiment of stroking behavior. Such expressions engage the listener's cognitive and affective faculties, potentially leading to a more profound emotional experience (i.e., metavolvement) as per the emotioncy model. Thus, while English speakers may achieve the desired emotional response through direct use of this cultuling, Persian speakers may elicit a deeper, more layered emotional connection through their culturally ingrained communicative practices.

### 5. Discussion

To investigate the cultuling of stroking behavior in Persian and English, a detailed analysis of the speech fragments embracing the cultuling of stroking behavior was performed. The findings revealed that in the Persian culture, stroking behavior is used mainly in informal/private situations while in English, it is practiced in formal/informal as well as public/private situations. Moreover, in both cultures, the interlocutors relate to each other on equal/formal, equal/intimate, unequal/formal, and unequal/intimate occasions. Persian and English speakers use stroking behavior in their speech with various objectives. Persian speakers use it to express dissatisfaction, love, and resentment and to flatter, criticize, and appreciate others. English speakers, on the other hand, use it to express anger, disapproval, affection and love, disagreement, and remorse and to affirm and appreciate others. The most frequent tones used by Persian speakers are complimentary, teasing, affectionate, admiring, and disappointed while the most frequent ones used by English speakers are supportive, accusatory, passionate, apologetic, and appreciative. In both cultures, individuals give stroke in spoken (verbal & nonverbal) as well as written forms.

The results of this study also demonstrated that verbal stroking behaviors are more prevalent in the Persian language. In other words, in general, Persian culture tends to place a strong emphasis on social interactions (Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). This can manifest in behaviors such as extensive greetings, offering compliments, and expressing interest in others' well-being. These behaviors can be seen as forms of stroking, demonstrating the recognition of others' presence. On the other hand, English-speaking cultures

also value respect in social interactions, but the specific behaviors and expressions used differ. English speakers exhibit stroking behavior more non-verbally through gestures like handshakes, maintaining eye contact, and active listening. However, in both cultures, individual differences can influence the extent to which these behaviors are displayed.

The use of stroking behavior in English is most predominant in romantic contexts, serving as an expression of passion. On the other hand, the practice of stroking behavior in Persian communication is not just restrained to a single context but is rather used in a variety of situations, each bearing a unique objective. Based on the results of this study, unlike the Persian-speaking communities, in the context of English-speaking communities, the prevalence of stroking behavior in romantic films can be attributed to the individualistic nature of English speakers. Conversely, the increased recurrence of stroking behavior in the daily conversations of individuals in various contexts within Persian culture affirms the collectivist nature of Iranian culture. This is in line with the findings of previous studies such as Hofstede (1980, 1991), Hofstede and Bond (1984), and Pishghadam et al. (2021a).

Moreover, the analysis of the speech fragments embracing the cultuling of stroking behavior revealed that English speakers tend to express themselves more directly, with clearer tones and goals, compared to Persian speakers. In Persian society, speakers often adopt an indirect approach, and the purposes behind using this cultuling in their speech may serve multiple functions. This observation aligns with the findings of Pishghadam and Firooziyan Pour Esfahani (2017) substantiating the indirectness of Persian speakers even in giving and receiving stroke from others.

Additionally, the results of this study are in line with those of Hassanzadeh and Alizadeh (2018) and Hofstede's (1980) extensive cultural study revealing that Iran belongs to the category of societies characterized by a significant power distance. Individuals in Iranian culture also tend to favor indirect and implicit communication methods over explicit and direct ones, aligning with a high-context culture (Hall, 1976) as well as an overstating one (Meyer, 2014). This finding is consistent with those of previous cultural studies (e.g., Jajarmi, 2023; Pishghadam & Attaran, 2014; Pishghadam et al., 2018). Another cultural dimension revealed in this study was the low-trust environment of Persian culture in which stroking behaviors are used to build or maintain trust. This finding is in line with that of Pishghadam and Jajarmi (2015) showing the low-trust propensity of Persian culture as opposed to the high-trust inclination of English culture.

Finally, based on the findings of the current study, Persian culture is inclined to show high waitance behaviors that may have its root in the dominant power relationships. That is, in Persian culture, the patience required to wait for the right moment for recognition or reward could reflect respect for established authority. This finding aligns with the assertions made by Pishghadam and Ebrahimi (2024) corroborating the high-waitance nature of the Persian culture as opposed to the low-waitance propensity of English culture.

## 6. Conclusion

The findings of the present study serve as a reflection of the Persian and English society's culture encapsulated in media. Various genres of films offer the opportunity to delve into the underlying structures, beliefs, verbal, and behavioral tendencies of that society. In the course of this research, both English and Persian films were analyzed, comparing the application of the cultuling of stroking behavior within these two distinct cultures. As cultulings encompass both language and culture, the conceptual model of CLA serves as a powerful tool to understand the intricate connection between these two aspects (Pishghadam & Ebrahimi, 2020). By delving into the intricacies of cultulings, language learners can enhance their linguistic skills and gain valuable insights into the diverse cultures of various communities. This, in turn, equips them with the necessary knowledge to foster effective communication and establish meaningful connections.

The present study investigated the use of verbal/nonverbal strokes in Persian and English languages. Future studies are suggested to delve more deeply into the different types of stroking behavior practiced by the speakers of these languages, that is, positive/negative and conditional/unconditional strokes. Moreover, a contrastive analysis of other cultulings through the lens of the conceptual model of CLA can be helpful in providing insight into the intricate dynamics of intercultural communication. Such analyses may reveal how cultural norms influence the perception and reception of strokes, potentially leading to a broader understanding of effective communication strategies across diverse social contexts. Additionally, exploring the impact of digital communication platforms on stroking behavior could offer valuable perspectives on the interaction within our increasingly connected world. Ultimately, this line of research could inform the development of educational programs aimed at enhancing cross-cultural competence.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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**About the authors**

**Zahra Ghadamyari** has an MA in TEFL from Bahar Institute of Higher Education, Mashhad, Iran. Her main research interests include sociology and psychology of language education.

**Haniyeh Jajarmi** has a PhD and is currently an assistant professor of language education at Bahar Institute of Higher Education, Mashhad, Iran. Her current research focuses on neuro-psychological and sociopsychological aspects of language education.

**Book Review**

# Review of *Towards Game Translation User Research*, Edited by Mikołaj Deckert, Krzysztof W. Hejduk, and Miguel Á. Bernal-Merino, ISBN: 9781009509800, Cambridge University Press. 2024.

**Amir Arsalan Zoraqi[1]***

Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran

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[1] https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8057-7050 | ✉ amir.zoraqi@mail.um.ac.ir

* Department of English, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran

As the name suggests, *Towards Game Translation User Research* (GTUR) is one of the most recent contributions to the canon of publications on the methodological foundations of game localization research. However, there is more to the book than meets the eye, and the discussions presented in the book could provide ontological refinements when it comes to the study of video games, on the one hand, and video game players, on the other. At its core, the Element is concerned with providing a blueprint for conducting user-centric studies in the context of game localization (cf. Deckert & Hejduk, 2024) by bringing together insights from reception studies in audiovisual translation, on the one hand, and human-computer interaction, on the other.

Being concerned with the intricacies involved in the interaction of players and game machines, *GTUR* essentially calls for more attention to the side of video game players and how their interaction with video games is different when proxied by language mediation (i.e., game localization). Player-centric studies have a rather nascent background in the context of game localization research, both in terms of players' reception (e.g., Deckert & Hejduk, 2022; O'Hagan, 2016), and perception (Ellefsen & Bernal-Merino, 2018; Fernández Costales, 2016)). Yet, the inchoate nature of research in this area would call for a dismantling of the complexities of player-game machine interaction to be able to progress this recent strand of research further. This is exactly where the contribution of the present Element lies. By breaking down and categorizing these complexities, the authors introduce three parameters that highlight areas that merit research, on the one hand, and that need to be taken into consideration when carrying user-centric research on video game players, on the other: (1) user experience facets, (2) translated game facets, and (3) game user facets. Each of these facets are covered discretely in separate chapters (chapters 2, 3, and 4), where the picture is depicted with respect to each facet, and concrete examples are providing either from the field of Game User Research (GUR), or audiovisual translation (AVT).

Chapter 1, "What has been done so far: An overview", sets the scene for introducing user-centric research in video games localization by providing an overview of the previous scholarly endeavors in this regard to "provide the reader with a well-informed insight into the scale and range of the VG [video game] translation work to date that adopts the vantage point of uses" (p. 1). The rather comprehensive overview of player-centric game localization research can provide background on when and how things have unfolded in the scene. There are some points of strength to this overview in that it provides a kaleidoscopic perspective that involves both European (e.g., Polish) and non-European (e.g., Persian) perspectives, which can aid with a more holistic problem statement. Additionally, the discussion is not limited to scholarly articles, and students' theses at the master's level are also introduced. As stated by the authors at the closing of this chapter 1, the reviewed works all detail an account of each of the three parameters to be discussed in the book. However, the lack of a critical account of the works discussed in this section is a point that merits to be highlighted. Had the authors discussed some of the limitations inherent to the works used to set the scene to build up on their discussions, the reader would have been more able to realize the need for methodological refinement or an ontological rethinking of some of the existing protocols in place, as the authors go on to argue in chapters 2-4.

Chapter 2, "Facets of User experience", is concerned with one of the most complex constructs to measure with respect to user-centric analysis, that is, player experience. For the sake of

contextualization, it would be useful to have a definition of player experience in mind. As defined by Wiemeyer et al. (2016), "player experience describes the qualities of the player-game interaction and is typically investigated during and after the interaction with games" (p. 245). Given the particular importance and relevance of player experience to any user-oriented perspective, the authors so aptly argue for a consideration of system elements (i.e., elements incorporated into the game design) that could impact the entire player experience. Upon providing a brief discussion on the difficulties involved in directly measuring "the process of play", the authors move on to introduce some of the methods that have already been used in game user research to gather both qualitative and quantitative data to measure and gain insights into player experience at a rudimentary level. This discussion is followed by the introduction of facets of user experience along with a detailed, in-depth look at one concrete example to operationalize the clusters of concepts introduced as facets of user experience: (1) immersion, absorption, presence, teleportation, and flow; (2) attention, cognitive load, comprehension, and memory; (3) affective response, feelings, and perceived funniness; and (4) satisfaction, enjoyment, and fun. As these concepts are by-products of the product at hand (i.e., video games), it goes without saying that those features of localized products merit attention to unravel how such mechanisms come about.

Along this line, chapter 3, "facets of translated games", is concerned with a discussion of those facets of translated (or localized) video games that can be manipulated to gain deeper insights into how translation-related phenomena can impact players' experiences. The features highlighted in this chapter are structures "in terms of their granularity" and revolve around culture, (gender) representation, linguistic variation, humor, accessibility, audiovisual materials, device considerations, genre conventions, and taboo, among others. These discussions are particularly relevant in that any form of cultural misrepresentation, gender exclusion, lost humor, inaccessibility, and lackluster voice performance can potentially break players' immersion or exert unnecessary cognitive load, to name but a few. Such considerations can indeed provide critical outlooks, both methodologically and ontologically, which serve to reduce the complexities inherent in the intricate whole with which the scholars in video game localization have to deal (i.e., localized products). More detailed accounts of the majority of these topics have been offered in previous publications by prominent scholars in the field (e.g., Bernal-Merino, 2015; Mejías-Climent, 2021; O'Hagan & Mangiron, 2013)). Yet, the authors' attempt at contextualizing these points within player-centric research on game localization has to be appreciated.

Chapter 4, "facets of game user(s)", which could be considered as the most important and most influential chapter in the entirety of the Element, has to do with the differences that the individual characteristics that users of localized products can bring to the table. These particularly prove influential and insightful in that the scope of application of these considerations could extend well beyond what has been explicitly or implicitly discussed in the book and find applications in any participant-centered study of video games or any other (non-)digital product. In this vein, the authors highlight the potential role of users' personalities, preferences, gaming backgrounds, and language proficiency in the design of reception research in game localization. While many of these insights have already been touched upon in previous reception studies on the perception of players (e.g., Ellefsen & Bernal-Merino, 2018), it is only fitting that highlighting them here is of particular relevance, especially when it comes to player-centric study in game localization.

Chapter 5, "Conclusions", brings all of the insights presented in the book together and, most importantly, provides a visual map that wraps up all of the proposed facets in a unified whole and the relationship that can stand between each facet with respect to one another. It also provides a brief discussion on how language experts can be incorporated into media development workflows and how the knowledge of such experts can come in handy for game development teams.

Now that we have covered the overall structure of the five chapters of this Element, it could be argued that *Towards Game Translation User Research* is a timely call for conducting more reception-based studies in the context of game localization, studies that go beyond the insights provided by the broader field of audiovisual translation. The authors successfully provide much fodder for discussion when it comes to player-centric reception studies, and raise so many valid questions that have remained so far unanswered. However, there are some criticisms that could be leveled at this stage. Firstly, it is our contention that the authors potentially have an unclear audience in mind. While the topics raised in the book are indeed intriguing and captivating, they have not been delved into with due detail. Indeed, each of the constructs discussed in Chapter 2, for instance, could be further enriched by a more detailed and in-depth account. This becomes especially important for early career game localization scholars and students who will, most probably, find many of the points highlighted in the book new and unlearned about.

Additionally, the discussions could benefit from further conceptual and theoretical depth since, more often than not, the authors are highlighting issues borrowed from game studies, psychology, and human-computer interactions, yet, the lack of theoretical refinement of some concepts makes it difficult to view the concepts from the eyes of the author. For instance, when it comes to such user experience elements as immersion, is immersion viewed as the property of the system, a response to narrative content, or a response to the challenges of the virtual game world? Although it could be argued that all roads lead to Rome, it is irrefutable that many of the constructs highlighted in this Element have a very ambiguous, contentious, and hard-to-pin-down nature. Consequently, it could be the case that many of the points highlighted will remain nebulous to the potential readership.

Overall, this Element can be considered a valuable contribution that takes the initiative to lay out the methodological and ontological foundation of player-centric research in game localization. The questions raised can serve as great starting points for further driving the field forward and addressing them through methodologies that have worked in contexts not mediated through translation, in the case of video games. The questions of interest here are crucial in the sense that they can help advance the questions raised in previous publications in different contexts of reception (e.g., Chen, 2023; Ellefsen & Bernal-Merino, 2018; Jooyaeian & Khoshsaligheh, 2022).

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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## About the author

**Amir Arsalan Zoraqi** is a PhD candidate in Game Localization at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran. He completed his M.A. in Translation Studies at Allameh Tabataba'i University, Iran. Amir Arsalan's research captures the social and cultural aspects involved in the theory and practice of game localization, particularly in Iran. His previous research has been published in other esteemed journals such as *Perspectives*, *Games and Culture,* and *Translation Spaces¸* among others.